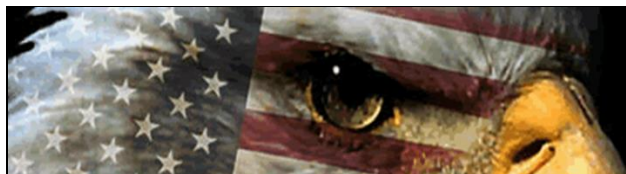



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	01/30 Gas prices rising, average to hit \$4?
SOURCE	https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2023/01/30/gas-prices-going-up/11150692002/
GIST	<p>Gas prices are continuing to rise to start 2023, and experts say prices are "unlikely to turn around any time soon."</p> <p>The current average for a regular gallon of gas \$3.50, according to AAA.</p>

While it's nowhere near the record \$5.01 reached in June, it's far more than what the average was heading into New Year's Day and what prices were one year ago.

Experts say it's possible the average price reaches \$4 later this year.

Here's what to know about gas prices heading into February:

How much have gas prices risen?

Gas prices had a steady decline following a record-breaking summer, going as low as \$3.10 on Dec. 22. But the national average has climbed for five straight weeks, including an 8-cent jump from last week. At this point in 2022, the average was \$3.36, according to AAA.

Why are gas prices going up again?

Last year's rise was heavily influenced by the [Russian invasion of Ukraine](#) and U.S. and European Union sanctions placed on Russia, but there are several factors for the current price increase:

[Gas demand has risen while the price of oil has slowly increased](#), AAA said Monday, citing data from the Energy Information Administration.

[Oil refinery utilization hasn't fully recovered](#) from cold weather in December and the refineries typically perform maintenance in the coming months, said Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy.

How long will gas prices continue to rise?

There's no clear answer.

With oil prices hovering around \$80 a barrel, U.S. drivers won't see a dip in prices within the next couple of weeks, experts said.

"There appears to be little good news on the gas price front, with prices unlikely to turn around any time soon," De Haan said.

Prices could even have bigger jumps later this year.

The average price for a gallon of [gas could be between \\$3.79 to \\$4.19 in June](#), GasBuddy said in its annual gas-prices outlook for 2023.

The current average is close to what Gasbuddy expects to be the yearly average of \$3.49 a gallon.

Where is gas the most expensive? Where is gas the cheapest?

The West Coast is where you'll find the most expensive, with Hawaii leading the way at \$4.93. Only three states – Hawaii, California and Washington – have averages above \$4.

Here are the five states with the highest average cost of gas:

- **Hawaii:** \$4.93
- **California:** \$4.55
- **Washington:** \$4.12
- **Nevada:** \$3.98
- **Colorado:** \$3.83

As for the cheapest gas prices in the country, look to the Midwest and South. Texas has the cheapest average price of gas in the U.S. at \$3.12.

Here are the five states with the lowest average cost of gas:

- **Texas:** \$3.12
- **Arkansas:** \$3.17

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mississippi: \$3.17 • Missouri: \$3.18 • Oklahoma: \$3.19
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HEADLINE	01/31 US, SKorea agree expand military drills
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/01/31/Lloyd-Austin-North-Korea-defense-commitment/2571675155073/
GIST	<p>SEOUL, Jan. 31 (UPI) -- U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and his South Korean counterpart Lee Jong-sup agreed Tuesday to expand combined military drills and step up deterrence efforts to respond to evolving North Korean nuclear and missile threats.</p> <p>Austin and Lee held bilateral talks in Seoul and condemned North Korea's continued provocations, including a slew of missile launches and recent drone incursions.</p> <p>In a joint statement, the two defense chiefs agreed to "strengthen combined exercises and training, including the upcoming combined bilateral exercises."</p> <p>The officials "concurred on the need to take into account changes in the security environment, including the DPRK's recent steps with respect to its nuclear and missile program."</p> <p>The Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea is the official name of North Korea.</p> <p>Austin and Lee said they agreed to boost information sharing and joint planning, including tabletop exercises focused on North Korean nuclear scenarios.</p> <p>The Pentagon chief's trip to South Korea comes as Washington looks to reassure its ally of its "extended deterrence" commitment against nuclear threats from the North.</p> <p>The commitment includes U.S. conventional, nuclear and missile-defense capabilities. However, questions about the reliability of the American nuclear umbrella have grown louder in Seoul amid North Korean provocations.</p> <p>Earlier this month, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol floated the idea of Seoul looking to deploy American tactical nuclear weapons or even developing its own if the security situation deteriorated.</p> <p>Public support for homegrown nukes has also been on the rise, with 76% of respondents in a recent survey favoring the idea of South Korea arming itself.</p> <p>Austin, however, said Tuesday that Washington and Seoul "are committed to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and we've long been that way."</p> <p>In a joint press briefing with Lee after their meeting, Austin said that the United States "stands firm" in its extended deterrence commitment.</p> <p>"As things continue to evolve, our alliance continues to strengthen and we look for ways to strengthen that extended deterrence," he added.</p> <p>Austin said that there would be more frequent deployments of U.S. strategic assets as advanced stealth jets and aircraft carriers to Korea.</p> <p>North Korean leader Kim Jong Un recently called for "an exponential increase" of the country's nuclear arsenal. He also ordered the mass production of lower-yield tactical nuclear weapons, which are designed to be used on the battlefield.</p>

	<p>Austin said that the tabletop exercises would make sure that Seoul and Washington "left no stone unturned" in nuclear defense preparations. The two defense chiefs also highlighted their commitment to boost trilateral security cooperation with Japan, including the enhanced sharing of missile warning data.</p> <p>The Pentagon chief was scheduled to meet with President Yoon before heading to the Philippines.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Living paycheck to paycheck climbs
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/other/even-on-100000-plus-more-americans-are-living-paycheck-to-paycheck/ar-AA16TA7p
GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- The share of Americans who say they live paycheck-to-paycheck climbed last year, and most of the new arrivals in that category were among the country's higher earners, a new study shows.</p> <p>Some 64% of US consumers — equivalent to 166 million people — were living paycheck-to-paycheck at the end of 2022, according to the survey by industry publication Pymnts.com and LendingClub Corp.</p> <p>That's an increase of 3 percentage points from a year earlier, or 9.3 million Americans. And out of that group, some 8 million were people earning more than \$100,000 a year. More than half of that income cohort said they lived paycheck-to-paycheck in December, up 9 percentage points from a year earlier.</p> <p>The numbers likely reflect growing strain on household budgets after the cost of living surged, wages often failed to keep up, and pandemic savings got drawn down.</p> <p>This year may bring further pressure, with less than half of the survey respondents saying they expect their incomes to keep pace with inflation.</p> <p>"Prospects for consumer spending are cloudy," said Lydia Boussour, senior economist at EY Parthenon. "Elevated prices, eroded personal savings and increased reliance on credit point to weak consumer spending this winter," she said. "These dynamics will be exacerbated by negative wealth effects from lower stock prices and declining home values."</p> <p>Other indicators also point to some level of financial stress. The latest University of Michigan survey showed that consumer sentiment, while it's climbed from 2022 lows, remains far below pre-pandemic levels. Fourth-quarter economic growth data published last week highlighted a slowdown in household spending.</p> <p>Inflation-adjusted disposable incomes remain below their levels at the start of the pandemic in 2020, indicating that consumers have seen no real income gains in three years, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis.</p> <p>The LendingClub report didn't provide a definition for paycheck-to-paycheck, which typically means that people rely entirely on their monthly incomes to meet basic obligations and would be in immediate difficulty if income was interrupted.</p> <p>The label doesn't necessarily mean that people are having trouble staying current on debt payments, but the survey suggests that a growing number are. It found that 24% of respondents had issues paying their bills in December. Among those earning more than \$100,000 and living paycheck-to-paycheck, the share rose to 16% from 11% a year earlier.</p> <p>The Pymnts.com and LendingClub study surveyed almost 4,000 people between Dec. 8 and Dec. 23.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/31 Fallout in Memphis police beating continues
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/31/us/tyre-nichols-investigation-tuesday/index.html

CNN — Fallout from the Memphis police beating death of a 29-year-old Black man continues with three more public servants fired as prosecutors more than three weeks after [Tyre Nichols](#)' brutal traffic stop say they're still looking at everyone involved leading up to, during and after the incident.

Officials Monday announced the [firings of three Memphis Fire Department personnel](#) and disclosed that two more police officers than previously known had been put on leave. That's on top of the five Memphis police officers who've already been fired and charged, the [disbanding](#) of a police unit they belonged to, and two sheriff's deputies put on leave.

"We are looking at everybody who had any kind of involvement in this incident," from the officers and paramedics on scene to those who filed the paperwork, Shelby County District Attorney Steven Mulroy said Monday.

Prosecutors moved "extraordinarily quick" with charges against the five officers "primarily responsible for the death of Tyre Nichols," the prosecutor said. "As to everybody else, it's going to take some time as we do that investigation, but I assure you the investigation's ongoing."

The release last week of [violent footage of Nichols' attack](#) yet again horrified a nation that's faced [a steady stream](#) of videos of police violence, especially against people of color. Beyond sparking protests from New York to Los Angeles and renewing calls for broad [police reform](#), the Nichols case has raised questions about [police units in other cities like the Memphis SCORPION squad](#) whose officers stopped Nichols on the road.

The January 7 incident began with police pulling Nichols over for what they initially said was suspected reckless driving and unfolds at two locations. [Video](#) released Friday shows Nichols running away after officers yanked him out of a car and used pepper spray [and a Taser](#) to [try to make him lie prone](#); and then officers catching up to him at a second location, where he is repeatedly kicked and beaten.

After his hands are restrained and he's left slumped to the ground, [roughly 23 minutes pass](#) before a gurney arrives at the scene. Nichols died at a hospital of his injuries three days later, authorities [said](#).

The Memphis Fire Department announced Monday that two emergency medical technicians and a fire lieutenant were terminated over their response on scene.

"I don't think we've seen the end of it. And I think we're going to find there's more to this as we go into the trial," Memphis City Council member Jeff Warren said. "I don't think we're on top of this yet."

"We need to make sure that we go through our police department and see where we were weak, what happened with our procedures, what happened with our oversight," Warren said.

The charges, firings and people placed on leave so far

Five Memphis police officers – all of them Black – were fired January 20 and then indicted last week. They face seven counts, including: second-degree murder, aggravated assault, aggravated kidnapping with bodily injury, aggravated kidnapping in possession of a deadly weapon, official misconduct and official oppression.

The five officers – Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Justin Smith, Emmitt Martin and Desmond Mills Jr. – are expected to be arraigned February 17.

On Monday, police said a sixth and a seventh officer were placed on leave with the other five on January 8 – and those two officers still are subjects of an internal investigation.

Police identified one of the two officers as Preston Hemphill, who is White. Police spokesperson Kimberly Elder declined to say whether Hemphill is being paid.

The city on Friday released body-camera and pole-camera surveillance footage of the initial traffic stop, as well as the beating at the second site. One of the body-cam videos reveals Hemphill – at the site of the initial traffic stop – fired a Taser at Nichols and eventually said after Nichols ran: “One of them prongs hit the bastard.”

Hemphill twice says to an officer who was with him: “I hope they stomp his ass.”

That body-cam video does not show Hemphill at the second site, where the county’s district attorney has said Nichols was beaten and suffered his serious injuries.

Hemphill’s attorney, Lee Gerald, said his client – who hasn’t been charged – “was never present at the second scene.”

The seventh officer has not been publicly identified.

“Officer Preston Hemphill and other officer’s actions and inactions have been and continue to be the subject of this investigation,” Memphis police said in a news release Monday.

“There are numerous charges still developing that are impending,” the news release reads.

The fire personnel terminated over their response to the encounter are emergency medical technicians Robert Long and JaMichael Sandridge and fire Lt. Michelle Whitaker, the fire department said Monday.

The three were responding to a report of “a person pepper sprayed” when they arrived at the scene of the deadly beating and found Nichols on the ground, according to the department.

The fire department’s investigation concluded that “the two EMTs responded based on the initial nature of the call and information they were told on the scene and failed to conduct an adequate patient assessment of Mr. Nichols,” the fire chief said in a news release.

Whitaker had remained in the fire truck, according to the statement.

Pole-camera video released Friday shows that after the EMTs arrived and before the ambulance arrived, first responders repeatedly walked away from Nichols, with Nichols intermittently falling onto his side.

Additionally, two deputies with the Shelby County Sheriff’s Office were put on leave last week pending an investigation, after video of the incident was released. “I have concerns about two deputies who appeared on scene following the physical confrontation between police and Tyre Nichols,” Sheriff Floyd Bonner Jr. said Friday.

Attorneys for two of the fired police officers have commented to CNN. Martin’s attorney, William Massey, said “no one out there that night intended for Tyre Nichols to die.”

Mills Jr.’s attorney, Blake Ballin, told CNN the videos “produced as many questions as they have answers,” specifically regarding his client’s involvement during the fatal encounter, adding that Mills arrived later than other officers and that his vision was impaired by the pepper spray used during the traffic stop.

“Some of the questions that remain will require a focus on Desmond Mills’ individual actions,” and “on whether Desmond’s actions crossed the lines that were crossed by other officers during this incident,” Ballin said.

Attorneys for the other former officers did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

‘A gross collapse of the system’

	<p>While some have praised Chief Cerelyn “CJ” Davis’ swift action in the case, she is also who created the now-deactivated SCORPION police unit that the charged officers were part of.</p> <p>“There is a reckoning coming for the police department and for the leadership,” Memphis City Council member Frank Colvett said. “She’s going to have to answer not just to the council but to the citizens – and really the world.”</p> <p>After the fire department firings were announced Monday, an attorney for Tyre Nichols’ family, Antonio Romanucci said, “everybody on that scene was complicit in this man’s death, in one way, shape, form, or another, somebody failed Tyre Nichols.”</p> <p>“They either failed by using excessive force; they failed him by severely beating him; they failed him by not intervening; they failed him by not rendering aid,” the attorney told CNN’s Wolf Blitzer on Monday.</p> <p>The attorney said Nichols’ family still is trying to absorb the breadth of this multi-agency investigation, while also dealing with the loss of their loved one.</p> <p>“This is just such a gross collapse of the system that we are supposed to trust, that it really is unspeakable,” Romanucci said.</p> <p>The Nichols family is expected to hold a press conference Tuesday night at Memphis’ Mason Temple Church of God in Christ headquarters, where Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous last speech the day before he was assassinated in that city, according to a news release from their attorney Ben Crump.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/31 Dangerous ice storm sweeps South
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/nearly-1000-flights-canceled-dangerous-ice-storm-sweeps-southern-us-rcna68321
GIST	<p>Nearly 1,000 flights within, into and out of the United States were canceled Tuesday as an ice storm swept over parts of the southern U.S.</p> <p>The storm was concentrated in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area, leaving the region hardest hit by travel issues, with 288 flights canceled at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport, according to online flight tracker FlightAware.</p> <p>The area is home to both American Airlines and Southwest Airlines and as of early Tuesday morning at least 319 Southwest flights were listed as canceled, along with 308 American flights. At least 90 Southwest flights were delayed, while 29 American flights were also listed as delayed, according to FlightAware.</p> <p>The ice storm was expected to be "prolonged and significant" and to "continue impacting a large area from the southern Plains to the Tennessee Valley," the National Weather Service said.</p> <p>It said the "dangerous" ice storm is expected to continue into at least early Thursday, bringing cold air, freezing rain and sleet, along with travel chaos and delays.</p> <p>"Widespread total ice accretion of greater than 0.25" is likely from West Texas to western Tennessee, with localized areas receiving as much as 0.75," the National Weather Service said. That amount of ice, it warned, could lead to hazardous travel conditions, along with tree damage and scattered power outages across the hardest-hit regions.</p> <p>Sleet accumulations around a half inch or higher are also possible from West Texas to Arkansas, which the weather service said could lead to "treacherous" travel conditions.</p>

	<p>Ice Storm Warnings, Winter Storm Warnings, and Winter Weather Advisories have been issued in affected areas, it said, warning travelers to check road conditions before heading out anywhere and to drive with extreme caution.</p> <p>The cold airmass bringing cold to the Mid-South is also expected to bring well-below-average temperatures and wind chills throughout the central and western United States, the weather service said.</p> <p>Wind Chill Warnings and Advisories have been issued across the central and northern Plains, as well as for parts of the Intermountain West.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/31 France faces disruption: pension protests
SOURCE	https://www.barrons.com/news/france-braces-for-disruption-as-more-pension-protests-loom-01675135810
GIST	<p>France woke up to a day of paralysis Tuesday with transport blockages, mass strikes and demonstrations hitting the country for the second time in a month to protest a planned reform to raise the retirement age.</p> <p>Around a million people were expected to take to the streets nationwide, a police source told AFP, rallying against plans to boost the age of retirement from 62 to 64.</p> <p>Some 11,000 police were mobilised across the country, with 4,000 deployed in Paris where several hundred extremist troublemakers were expected, according to the interior ministry.</p> <p>On January 19, some 1.1 million took to the streets in rallies against the proposed shake-up -- the largest protests since the last major round of pension reform in 2010.</p> <p>Millions had to find alternative means of transport Tuesday, work from home or take time off to look after their school-age children, with workers in transport and education sectors among those staging walkouts.</p> <p>"This is about more than pensions, it is about what kind of society we want," 59-year-old university professor Martine Beugnet told AFP, saying she would take part in Tuesday's protest.</p> <p>Most Paris metro and suburban rail services were severely restricted, the capital's transport operator RATP said.</p> <p>Intercity travel was also disrupted, with just one in three high-speed trains likely to run, railway company SNCF predicted.</p> <p>In the southwestern city of Bordeaux, Cheikh Sadibou Tamamate, 36, arrived at the train station in the small hours of Tuesday, hoping to catch a morning train to Paris after the one he was booked on around 5:00 am (0400 GMT) never left.</p> <p>"Unfortunately it was cancelled," he said.</p> <p>Sitting on a bench with an open laptop Guillaume Chaux, 32, said he discovered his train had been cancelled as he arrived at the station, but he still hoped to make it to London Tuesday.</p> <p>"I'm looking at travel apps to see if I can get another train. Nobody has told me anything," he said.</p> <p>Air travel is to be less badly affected, with national carrier Air France saying it would cancel one in 10 short and medium-haul services, but long-distance flights would be unaffected.</p> <p>Only minor disruptions were expected on international train services including the Eurostar.</p> <p>Around half of all nursery and primary school teachers would be striking, the main teachers' union Snuipp-FSU said.</p>

France's oil industry was mostly paralysed, with the hardleft CGT union at energy giant TotalEnergies reporting between 75 and 100 percent of workers on strike.

Sixty-one percent of French people support the protest movement, a poll by the OpinionWay survey group showed on Monday -- a rise of three percentage points from January 12.

The most controversial part of the overhaul is hiking the minimum retirement age.

But the changes are also to increase the number of years people have to make contributions before they can receive a full pension.

President Emmanuel Macron put pensions reform at the heart of his re-election campaign last year.

The 45-year-old centrist on Monday said the changes were "essential when we compare ourselves to the rest of Europe".

France has the lowest qualifying age for a state pension among major European economies.

The government has said the changes are necessary to guarantee the future financing of the pension system, which is forecast to tip into deficit in the next few years.

But opponents point out that the system is not in trouble, quoting the head of the independent Pensions Advisory Council as saying: "Pension spending is not out of control, it's relatively contained."

The government has signalled there could be wiggle room on some of the suggested measures, but Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne has said raising the age of retirement was "non-negotiable".

Parliament committees started examining the bill on Monday.

The left-wing opposition has submitted more than 7,000 amendments to the draft legislation in a bid to slow its path through parliament.

Macron's centrist allies, short of an absolute majority, will need votes from conservatives to push through the new legislation.

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HEADLINE	01/31 Nigeria: violence risks derailing elections
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/31/violence-in-nigeria-risks-derailing-forthcoming-presidential-elections
GIST	<p>Routine violence in south-east Nigeria including attacks on the offices of the electoral commission threatens to derail next month's presidential elections, experts have said.</p> <p>At least 50 attacks by armed groups against staff and facilities of the electoral commission (Inec) have been recorded between the last election in 2019 and the end of 2022. Most have taken place in the south-east, which is in the grip of secessionist agitation by various elements, especially the Indigenous People of Biafra (Ipob).</p> <p>"It is a possibility that voting might not take place in some areas going by the security situation in the region, and not just in the south-east," said Malik Samuel, an Abuja-based researcher at the Institute of Security Studies.</p> <p>In south-east Nigeria, scores of assaults have been blamed on the Ipob group or its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). More than 100 police and other security personnel have been killed since the beginning of 2021 in targeted attacks, according to tallies by local media.</p>

Ipob, which says the area has been marginalised at the federal level and seeks a separate state for ethnic Igbo people, has repeatedly denied responsibility for the violence.

Since 2021, it has issued a once-a-week stay-at-home order, which completely paralyses economic and social activities across the south-east, in response to the government's detention of its leader, Nnamdi Kanu, on a series of charges including terrorism.

"You cannot even mention the election," said a lawyer from the south-east who requested anonymity out of concerns for her safety. The lawyer said that when she mentioned to her mother that she had taken a long round trip to pick up her voting card, her mother replied that it was "not something you want other ears to hear because you don't know who is who".

James Barnett, a researcher affiliated with the Hudson Institute in Washington DC, said insecurity remained a significant challenge in the south-east. "This is seen in the degree to which residents still adhere to sit-at-home orders, not out of sympathy to the militants, but out of fear for their lives," he said.

"It seems clear that militants, whatever their motivations, remain capable of terrorising ordinary Nigerians in the region with concerning consistency."

An influx of arms and a weakened and overstretched military has allowed other armed groups acting with obscure motives to perpetuate attacks.

"Ipob has become so fractured that it's difficult to speak of it as a coherent movement any more – and a lot of criminals or political thugs seem to be using Ipob as a cover for their activities," Barnett said.

Insecurity is a nationwide problem. Security forces are fighting a 13-year war against jihadists in the north-east, and bandit militias are terrorising communities in the north-west, where Ansaru, a terror group linked with al-Qaida, has prohibited local people from participating in the election.

Underlining the sense of untrammelled violence in Africa's most populous nation, dozens of cattle herders and bystanders were killed in a suspect bomb blast last Tuesday in the north-central region, also known as the Middle Belt, which is prone to violence due to clashes between Fulani pastoralists and farmers, who are mainly Christian.

Nigerians are set to choose a new president on 25 February to replace Muhammadu Buhari, who has reached the end of his two-term limit. The former military general who previously led the country for a few years in the 1980s after a coup, campaigned for the post on a promise to get to grips with insecurity, but is widely judged to have failed miserably, and has cut an increasingly muted and remote figure.

The election pits Bola Tinubu, a 70-year-old former governor from Buhari's ruling All Progressives Congress against Atiku Abubakar, a 76-year-old former vice-president and wealthy executive from the main opposition People's Democratic party, who is on his sixth bid for the presidency, as well as Peter Obi, a 61-year-old former state governor running for the Labour party as the "change" candidate.

Nigeria's elections in the past have been marred by logistical delays, violence and claims of fraud and vote buying. In 2019, the Inec was forced to postpone the election by a week just hours before voting was scheduled to start because of difficulty getting material to polling stations.

Elections have also been characterised by low turnout, which dropped from 44% in the 2015 presidential election to 35% in 2019. Experts have said disenfranchisement caused by insecurity could lead to that figure dropping again this year.

"If people for security reasons are not able to vote, that is a problem for the credibility of the election," Samuel said.

HEADLINE	01/30 Peru political turmoil: widespread, deadly
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/30/journey-through-the-centre-of-peru-uprising-dina-boluarte
GIST	<p>One by one, the rebel campesinos clambered up to the improvised podium they had built atop a 6ft earth barricade, to declare their determination to topple the president of Peru.</p> <p>“Brothers and sisters, right now our Peru needs us more than ever,” Nilda Mendoza Coronel, a 35-year-old farmer, told hundreds of strikers who had gathered under a ferocious morning sun.</p> <p>“We’ll fight until the very end, carajo!” Mendoza bellowed through a megaphone. “No one will stop our struggle!”</p> <p>Another speaker, Aparicio Meléndez, urged the crowd in the Andean town of Sicuani to ignore reports that army troops were en route to extinguish their revolt.</p> <p>“We’ll stay here until they’ve spent their very last bullet,” the 55-year-old grazier vowed as he looked out on the protest blocking the 940-mile highway through the Peruvian Andes.</p> <p>A two-word rallying cry had been painted on to the tarmac behind the barricade: “People’s insurgency.”</p> <p>Sicuani is at the heart of the seven-week-old insurrection against Peru’s president, Dina Boluarte, and the country’s political establishment that began in early December after its leftist president, Pedro Castillo, was unseated and arrested after being accused of trying to stage a coup.</p> <p>Strange and violent political winds have been buffeting Latin America and the Caribbean of late, with a far-right uprising in Brazil, political and social meltdown in Haiti, and protests after the arrest of one of Bolivia’s most prominent opposition leaders. But nowhere has the turmoil been more widespread or deadly than in Peru, where at least 58 lives have been lost since Castillo’s dramatic demise.</p> <p>Huge swaths of South America’s fourth most populous country have been paralysed by protests and roadblocks since Castillo’s downfall, as his supporters – and those outraged at the government’s deadly response – hit the streets to demand Boluarte’s resignation, fresh elections and justice for the dozens allegedly killed by security forces.</p> <p>The Guardian travelled through the most affected region, between the Andean cities of Cusco and Juliaca – where 17 people were killed in the worst day of violence – to hear the voices of the mutiny against the Peruvian government.</p> <p>The gruelling 210-mile journey took three days and involved navigating scores of checkpoints guarded by campesino protesters, as well as hundreds of barricades made from boulders, tree trunks, dilapidated vehicles, glass and scrap metal.</p> <p>Beyond the roadblocks, it was also a journey through the profound social inequality, grinding poverty and discrimination that lie behind the explosion of rural anger against what many protesters call the corrupt, self-serving and largely white political establishment in the capital, Lima.</p> <p>“It’s as if we aren’t humans ... It’s as if we are worth nothing,” said Raúl Constantino Samillán Sanga, whose 30-year-old brother was gunned down in Juliaca during clashes between police and protesters. “The whole of the Andes is now saying we’ve had enough – this must change.”</p> <p>The trip through the centre of Peru’s political earthquake began in Cusco, once the capital of the Inca empire and, today, the South American country’s most important tourist destination, with nearly 3 million visitors each year.</p> <p>The tourists have vanished since the uprising began, with Cusco’s airport repeatedly shut down by authorities and the nearby Machu Picchu closed earlier this month.</p>

“Everyone’s on edge and worried and a bit scared too,” said Hannah Jenkinson, a British fashion designer who runs a boutique in Cusco’s now largely deserted historic centre.

A few streets away, hundreds of demonstrators marched towards the plaza where in the 18th century the Indigenous leader Túpac Amaru was quartered and beheaded after rebelling against Spanish rule.

“She’s going down! She’s going down! The murderer’s going down!” the crowds chanted of Boluarte as they surged through Cusco’s cobbled streets waving Peru’s red and white flag.

Twenty-five miles south-east of Cusco, past pre-Incan ruins and eucalyptus-dotted mountains, lay the village of Villahermosa – the location of the first major roadblock along Peru’s Route 3S highway.

Dozens of villagers, including elderly women clutching traditional huaraca whips woven from alpaca fleece, had blocked the road with tree trunks and tyres to express their fury at decades of government neglect and the recent wave of killings, most of which have been blamed on security forces.

Juvenal Luna Jara, 22, said he had joined the rebellion one week earlier, incensed that so many protesters had been killed in Peru’s long-neglected rural south, which was at the centre of the brutal 12-year war waged by the Shining Path guerrilla group. As he saw it, the majority of lives were lost in such regions because provincianos (country folk) were considered second-class citizens, or worse. “It’s as if they were killing dogs,” he fumed.

Hours earlier, Boluarte had implored protesters to accept a nationwide truce. But there was no hint of compromise in Villahermosa as farmers gathered to vent their rage at the president’s role in the ousting of Castillo, a former union leader who was born into poverty and was propelled into the presidency in 2021 by impoverished rural voters in places such as this.

“If there’s no solution, the struggle will go on,” the villagers roared before the Guardian’s vehicle was allowed to continue its journey.

In village after village along the boulder-strewn highway, the message was the same, as disillusioned and downtrodden farmers gathered by their blockades to offer impassioned speeches about the state of their nation and how their resource-rich mining region had been milked for profits that were never seen.

Dina Quispe wept as she denounced how Peruvian authorities had branded the protesters narco-funded terrucos (terrorists) and met their call for political change with repression and bloodshed.

“We have been humiliated and forgotten,” said the 41-year-old saleswoman from the community of Checuyoc. “They are killing our brothers with bullets.”

Through her tears, Quispe voiced disgust that she shared a first name with Peru’s first female president. Boluarte has become a lightning rod for far deeper disillusionment with the broken politics of a country that has had seven presidents in the last six years and where a quarter of the population struggle to properly feed themselves.

Quispe said to reporters: “Please, take this voice of protest from deepest and humble Peru [to the world].”

A few miles away in Sicuani, a town now almost completely cut off from the outside world by the roadblocks, hundreds of Quechua women wearing sombreros, pollera skirts and dazzling quilts were on the march.

“We are fighting for our future and the future of our children and our grandchildren,” said Roxana Chahuanco, 40, as locals prepared to debate their next move after the government announced it would deploy troops to clear the roads.

There, Mendoza Coronel evoked the Indigenous martyrs Túpac Amaru and his wife, Micaela Bastidas, as she urged locals to intensify their peasant rebellion against the “corrupt” Lima elites. “They look down on us because we are the children of campesinos and for being men of the fields,” she said.

At the next village, a cow’s skull had been placed on a pole above a barricade fashioned from two heaps of rubble and earth. “It’s Dina,” joked one of the women policing the checkpoint.

From Sicuani, the highway climbed even higher into the Andes towards the spectacular 4,300-metre border with the department of Puno, where Aymara Indigenous communities are also in revolt against the new government.

Boluarte further infuriated the region’s inhabitants last week when she told foreign journalists “Puno isn’t Peru” – a declaration the president subsequently claimed had been misunderstood.

“We are Peruvians,” said one woman guarding a roadblock outside the town of Ayaviri. “It was in Puno that the Inca empire was born.”

After Ayaviri, the highway descended towards Puno’s largest city, Juliaca, a dilapidated and edgy mining and smuggling hub, where anti-government protests continue to rage as local families mourn their dead.

Behind a metal door decorated with a black ribbon of mourning sat María Ysabel Samillán Sanga, who lost her younger brother one Monday in early January.

Marco Antonio Samillán Sanga was a medical student who had been working as a volunteer medic in Juliaca when protesters tried to storm the city’s airport and security forces responded with live ammunition.

The 30-year-old student was shot through the heart as he attended to a boy who had inhaled teargas – one of at least 17 people to die in Juliaca that day. “It was a massacre,” said his sister. “There is no other word for it.”

Samillán Sanga wept as she remembered how her brother had worked his way out of extreme poverty and into medical school. He had dreamed of becoming a neurosurgeon and creating health programmes for Puno’s rural poor.

“Right now, I feel like I’m being obliged to live ... If it was up to me, I’d die too because there are days I just cannot cope with this pain,” she said, tears coursing down her cheeks.

Samillán Sanga also saw prejudice and discrimination at the root of her brother’s death and Peru’s uprising. “We have feelings. We are humans. We feel. We cry. We have emotions. And we are in pain,” said her brother, Raúl Constantino.

The family said they feared government reprisals for speaking out but would not be silenced. “I hope someone reads this and thinks: how is the Samillán Sanga family?” said María Ysabel. “Because the truth is we have been shattered. My family will never be the same again.”

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HEADLINE	01/30 Israel drone strike hit Iran weapons facility
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/israel-drone-strike-hit-iranian-weapons-facility-11675110298?mod=hp_lead_pos11
GIST	<p>An Israeli drone strike inside Iran hit an advanced weapons-production facility in an attack that Israel believes achieved its goals, according to people familiar with discussions about the operation.</p> <p>The operation early Sunday morning was executed by Israel’s intelligence agency, the Mossad, and targeted a Ministry of Defense site in Isfahan in central Iran, hitting a building in four different areas with</p>

precision strikes, the people said. Satellite photos showed what appeared to be minor damage to the site's roof, but the people called the mission successful, without elaborating.

The account contradicts Iranian officials who have said the country's air defenses had fended off an attempted attack on [an ammunition depot](#) that caused minimal damage.

The attack marked another chapter in the long-running conflict between Israel and Iran, with Israel using sabotage, assassination and drone strikes to target Iran's nuclear program and its conventional weapons capabilities, and Iran arming militias along Israel's borders.

The people said the Ministry of Defense site that was targeted Sunday was a weapons-production facility. It stands across the street from a site belonging to the Iran Space Research Center, which has been sanctioned by the U.S. for its work on Iran's ballistic-missile program. The space-research center houses the Institute for Materials and Energy, which conducts research that could be used in the development of drones, missiles, satellites and for testing metals for the nuclear project, said Ronen Solomon, an independent intelligence analyst in Israel.

On Monday, Iranian state media published fragments of the small drones used in the strike. If authentic, the depicted drones are most likely Chinese-made quadcopter drones with limited range that may have been launched from within Iran, given their small size and Isfahan's location hundreds of miles from its country's borders, said Tal Beeri, head of the Alma Center Research Department in Israel and a former Israeli military intelligence officer.

"By the way, you can order it online," Mr. Beeri said of the drones.

The people familiar with the discussions compared Sunday morning's operation to an Israeli quadcopter drone strike last year on Iranian drone-production sites in the western city of Kermanshah. In retaliation last March, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps fired missiles into the Iraqi Kurdish city of Erbil, alleging that the region housed Mossad operatives who launched the drone attack.

Israel's strike, which the country's leadership hasn't publicly acknowledged, was cheered in Ukraine, where U.S. officials say Russia has used Iranian-made drones to attack civilian infrastructure. Iran on Monday summoned the chargé d'affaires of Ukraine's embassy in Tehran over a tweet by an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"Explosive night in Iran," tweeted the adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak, before indicating Ukraine had warned Iran not to get involved in the conflict with Russia.

Iran has acknowledged that it has supplied drones to Russia, but said the transfer took place before Moscow invaded Ukraine, a claim U.S. officials have disputed.

The drone attack immediately preceded a visit to the Middle East by Secretary of State Antony Blinken. He declined to comment specifically on the attack when asked by reporters.

"I'll say more generally that for the United States as well as for many of our partners in the region, it is very important that we continue to deal with—and work against, as necessary—the various actions that Iran has engaged in, through the region and beyond the region," Mr. Blinken said.

In response, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said: "The U.S. administration knows well that the Islamic Republic will give a regrettable and firm response to aggressors."

Iran hasn't blamed any country for the attack on the Isfahan site. Iranian officials say two drones exploded after being jammed, while another was shot down, harmlessly hitting the building.

Iran says the Institute for Materials and Energy is used to develop civilian technologies. Mr. Solomon, the intelligence analyst, said its location across the street from a Defense Ministry site indicates its research may also be used to produce advanced weaponry, Mr. Solomon said.

The Iran Space Research Center says on its website that it can conduct reverse engineering, which could be used to copy Russian military technologies passed on to the Iranians, Mr. Solomon said.

“The research group is building the production line for the department of defense,” said Mr. Solomon, the author of the Intelitimes blog who is working on a book about the history of Israel’s decadeslong campaign to foil Iran’s nuclear and missile programs.

Mr. Solomon said he relied on official Iranian documents, such as pictures and video published online from inside the Iran Space Research Center, official information that the organization has published, publicly available academic research and previous intelligence reports in order to build a profile of the facility that was attacked.

Israel’s latest strike comes as Israeli and American officials are discussing new ways to combat Iran’s destabilizing operations, including its deepening military cooperation with Russia.

Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns made an unannounced trip to Israel last week to discuss Iran and other regional issues, according to people familiar with his visit.

Last week, the U.S. and Israel carried out their largest-ever joint military exercise involving more than 7,500 personnel from both countries and a series of scenarios to test their ability to take out air-defense systems and refuel jet planes—both of which could be key elements of a major military strike on Iran.

President Biden’s efforts to resurrect a nuclear containment deal with Iran have come to a standstill, but the U.S. has yet to develop an alternative. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been pushing the U.S. to take a tougher stance against Iran.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Ukraine urges faster weapons deliveries
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraines-zelensky-urges-faster-weapons-deliveries-amid-russian-push-11675081597?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>BAKHMUT, Ukraine—Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for the West to accelerate deliveries of weapons to Kyiv, as Ukrainian forces battled to keep Russian troops from encircling Bakhmut, the city in eastern Ukraine where the fiercest fighting is under way.</p> <p>Russian forces have battered Ukrainian positions in the country’s east in recent weeks, pushing for a breakthrough before tanks pledged by Kyiv’s partners begin to arrive on the battlefield. In the eastern Donetsk region, Ukrainian troops are coming under constant attack from Russian forces, Mr. Zelensky said in his nightly address, describing the situation as “very tough.”</p> <p>“The speed of supply has been and will be one of the key factors in this war,” he said. “Russia hopes to drag out the war, to exhaust our forces.”</p> <p>Soldiers fighting around Bakhmut say they are struggling to hold back the Russians, as months of grinding battle erodes the Ukrainians’ manpower and weaponry.</p> <p>The U.S., Germany and other European countries committed last week to supply Kyiv with battle tanks, but it will be several months before they can be deployed in combat.</p> <p>During a visit to South Korea on Monday, North Atlantic Treaty Organization Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg urged Seoul to provide military support to Ukraine, saying the country was in urgent need</p>

of ammunition. South Korea has sent materials such as gas masks, bulletproof vests and medical supplies to Ukraine, but has declined to provide lethal weapons.

Russia has slammed Western pledges to supply tanks as an escalation in the war, while playing down the likely impact on the battlefield. In Moscow, U.S. ambassador Lynne Tracy met with Russia's deputy minister of foreign affairs, Sergei Ryabkov, for the first time since being sworn in this month.

After months of failed assaults on Bakhmut, Russian forces are moving to encircle the city, which sits at the intersection of several major roads. Control over Bakhmut would help Russia advance on other cities in Ukraine's eastern Donbas area, which President Vladimir Putin has identified as the primary objective of his campaign in Ukraine. It would also be a major symbolic prize after months of grinding combat that have turned Bakhmut into an epicenter of the war, with thousands of soldiers killed and wounded on both sides.

"The enemy is trying to surround the city," said the deputy commander of the 93rd battalion, which is tasked with holding the eastern side of the city.

Speaking in a basement in central Bakhmut, surrounded by computer screens displaying maps of the front line and live drone footage, the deputy commander said Ukrainian defenders had lost positions including trenches on the outskirts of the city, making it harder to hold, but that the situation remains under control.

There is intense fighting over Blahodatne, 10 miles north of the city center, he said, contradicting a claim by the Wagner paramilitary organization on Sunday that it had seized the village. Eight miles west of Bakhmut, Russian forces are trying to capture Ivanivske, and shelling the main road into the city from the west.

"Conditions are really tough... We'll hold on as long as possible," he said.

A commander of a mortar team said his battalion had recently received new U.S. mortar launchers, replacing Soviet-era mortars the team was using previously.

"They work much better, but we need more of them," he said.

Denis Pushilin, the head of a part of eastern Ukraine that Moscow cleaved from the country in 2014, said Russian forces were advancing in the main areas of Bakhmut, but that it was too soon to say that Russian forces had managed to encircle the city.

Cutting off the road that is used to supply Ukrainian forces in Bakhmut from Chasiv Yar, which is due west, is now a priority, Mr. Pushilin said.

Russian forces have also entrenched themselves in the eastern part of Vuhledar, another Donetsk town, he said.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian forces appeared to be attacking supply lines to the Russian-occupied Crimean Peninsula over the weekend. A railway bridge near the city of Melitopol in the occupied part of the southern Zaporizhzhia region was hit by Ukrainian forces, the Russian-backed governor, Yevgeniy Balitsky, said Sunday.

Four civilians were killed and five were injured in the strike by a U.S.-made multiple-rocket launcher known as a Himars, Mr. Balitsky said in a statement posted on social media.

The recent push comes as Russia seeks to build momentum after seizing the town of Soledar, just outside Bakhmut, earlier in January in its first significant success for months. In the south, Russian forces are also pressing an offensive in the Zaporizhzhia region, also claimed by Moscow.

	<p>An influx of Russian troops—many of them convicts who have joined the Russian paramilitary group Wagner, as well as soldiers recently mobilized by the regular army—has given Moscow a manpower advantage.</p> <p>The U.K.’s Ministry of Defense said Russian authorities were likely leaving the door open to further rounds of mobilization. Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov said last week that a decree on “partial mobilization” remained in force to support the work of the armed forces. He declined to say, however, whether more people would be drafted soon.</p> <p>“The Russian leadership highly likely continues to search for ways to meet the high number of personnel required to resource any future major offensive in Ukraine, while minimizing domestic dissent,” the U.K.’s Ministry of Defense said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Russia boosts China trade; counter West
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-ramps-up-china-trade-to-counter-western-sanctions-11675079584
GIST	<p>Trade between China and Russia boomed last year, providing a lifeline to Russia’s beleaguered economy and showing the limits of Western sanctions, according to a new report.</p> <p>Moscow boosted imports of technologies critical to its war in Ukraine including semiconductors and microchips from China, the report by the D.C.-based nongovernmental organization Free Russia Foundation said. China’s increased purchases of Russian exports, driven by energy sales, more than offset the declines from major Western trading partners including the U.S., U.K. and some European Union countries.</p> <p>“As the U.S., EU, the U.K. have all scaled back operations with Russia, China has emerged, by a wide margin, to be Russia’s most important trade partner,” the report says.</p> <p>Based on 40 million entries of customs records obtained by the Free Russia Foundation, the report offers a granular view of Russia’s trade, which was obscured after the imposition of Western sanctions. In April, Russian customs authorities suspended their monthly publication of data on exports and imports, among other statistics, saying at the time that it wanted to avoid “incorrect estimates, speculations and discrepancies in terms of import deliveries.” Its January 2022 data are the latest available.</p> <p>Russian and Chinese trade authorities didn’t respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>China has become a supplier of some key technologies that can have a military purpose despite the Western sanctions. China sold \$3.3 million worth of unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, to Russia last year, according to the data. The report noted that drone deliveries to Russia continued in November and December from the United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, China and Singapore.</p> <p>Russia last year increased its imports of semiconductors and microchips by around 34%, with China emerging as the major source. That has helped Russia increase its overall import of chips to \$2.45 billion in 2022 from \$1.82 billion in 2021, despite Western sanctions targeting that trade.</p> <p>Russia and China have spent years forging stronger economic ties, including a \$55 billion gas pipeline and Russia’s increased usage of China’s yuan. The economic relationship has deepened even as long-simmering concerns remain among officials in Moscow that Russia could become captive to China’s economic orbit.</p> <p>The Free Russia Foundation obtained the data in coordination with Madrid-based IE University from a third-party data provider that offers value-chain analysis to companies. The team that worked on the report included Russian economists and former Russian officials based outside of Russia, including Sergey Aleksashenko, a former central bank deputy chairman, and Vladimir Milov, a former deputy energy minister and an opposition politician.</p>

To verify its validity, the authors compared the data set with official Russian trade statistics published up to January 2022 and Russia's trade partners' 2022 data. One of the limitations of the data set, the report says, is that the records are partially redacted for military transactions.

Trade between Russia and China rose by roughly \$27 billion between March and September of last year compared with the same period in 2021, according to the report, to reach \$99 billion.

Much of the growth was because of higher sales of crude, which Russia began diverting to China and other markets such as India and Turkey as Western countries restricted purchases of Russia's energy products.

Russia also grew more dependent on Chinese goods. About 36% of its imports were from China in the period from March to September. That is up sharply from 21% in 2021 in the same period.

After Russia's invasion, the U.S., South Korea and Japan all banned the sales of high-tech products including semiconductors on which Russia relies.

As some of Russia's traditional suppliers of high-tech goods, such as Germany, the Netherlands and South Korea scaled back their shipments, imports from China more than doubled. In the March to September period, the value of Chinese semiconductor exports to Russia jumped from \$200 million in 2021 to over \$500 million last year. The number of transactions rose as well, the report says.

Russia also imported semiconductors from Turkey, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. While these countries don't have substantial domestic semiconductor industries, Russia can purchase widely accessible chips from distributors there, analysts say.

"China is capable of producing many types of lower-tech chips domestically, so it is unsurprising Russia is buying these," said Chris Miller, associate professor at Tufts University who wasn't involved in the report.

Still, Mr. Miller said, "military systems use a wide array of chips and so they could be facing shortages for specific chips even if they're able to buy large volumes of other chips."

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HEADLINE	01/30 Consumer spending starting to sputter
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/consumer-spending-inflation-economy-11675093472?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	<p>The engine of the U.S. economy—consumer spending—is starting to sputter.</p> <p>Retail purchases have fallen in three of the past four months. Spending on services, including rent, haircuts and the bulk of bills, was flat in December, after adjusting for inflation, the worst monthly reading in nearly a year. Sales of existing homes in the U.S. fell last year to their lowest level since 2014 as mortgage rates rose. The auto industry posted its worst sales year in more than a decade.</p> <p>It's a stark turnaround from the second half of 2020, when Americans lifted the economy out of a pandemic downturn, helping the U.S. avoid what many economists worried would be a prolonged slump. Consumers snapped up exercise bikes, televisions and laptop computers for schoolchildren during lockdowns. When restrictions were lifted, they rushed back to their favorite restaurants and travel destinations.</p> <p>And they kept spending, helped by government stimulus, flush savings accounts and cheap credit, even as inflation picked up. Faced with four-decade-high inflation last year, Americans outspent it. Through most of 2022, consumer spending growth exceeded price increases by about 2 percentage points.</p> <p>Now the forces that helped keep spending high are unwinding, while inflation remains elevated. The share of monthly income Americans set aside for savings was 3.4% in December, down from 7.5% a year earlier and from a record high in April 2020. Credit-card interest rates have been rising, and Federal Reserve</p>

officials have signaled that they plan an additional [quarter-percentage point increase](#) to the central bank's benchmark rate this week. That would bring the rate to between 4.5% and 4.75%, from near zero at the start of last year.

Annual inflation, as measured by the consumer-price index, remained above 5% in December for the 19th straight month, the longest such streak since the early 1980s.

Consumer spending accounts for roughly 70% of the economy. A downshifting consumer is a key reason that business and academic economists polled by The Wall Street Journal, on average, put the [probability of a recession](#) in the next 12 months at 61%. However, many economists say, the U.S. might avoid a recession entirely if spending patterns stabilize.

One factor making forecasting more difficult: While unemployment is trending at a half-century low, big companies including [Amazon.com](#) Inc., [Goldman Sachs Group](#) Inc., and [Microsoft](#) Corp. have [begun to cut jobs](#).

"The last bastion of strength is the labor market, but I don't think it can withstand all these other forces," said Nationwide Chief Economist Kathy Bostjancic.

Recent layoff trends worry Benjamin DeLong, a 32-year-old customer-account manager at an industrial manufacturer in southern Minnesota. His savings rose to \$3,700 during the pandemic, thanks in part to government stimulus. He is now down to about 3 cents.

Mr. DeLong said he had to dip into his savings to cover the rising costs of his groceries, utilities and car insurance. He has found some relief in his grocery bills since he and his partner decided last year to purchase some pigs, jointly with other families, to be raised on a relative's farm. Their portion of meat yielded nearly 150 pounds, saving them about \$500 on groceries, Mr. DeLong estimated.

The possibility of layoffs, he said, is "part of the crunch that I'm having to consider now. What's going to happen if I no longer have an income?"

So far, jobs have remained plentiful and wages continued to rise in the face of Federal Reserve tightening. Unemployment was a low 3.5% in December. Hourly wages were up a robust 4.6% year-over-year. There were about 10.5 million [unfilled jobs](#) available in November, according to the Labor Department, a sign that demand for labor remained strong.

"Households had a ton of comfort they don't normally have about their job prospects," said Marianne Wanamaker, an economist at the University of Tennessee. "They knew they could get a job tomorrow if they wanted to, and that remains mostly true."

Still, there are signs of labor-market weakness. Employers are [shedding temporary workers](#) at a fast rate, and people who lose their jobs are [taking longer](#) to find new ones. Meanwhile, the number of hours worked a week has declined for two straight months, according to the Labor Department, resulting in a slowdown in workers' take-home pay.

Mikhail Andersson, owner of First Class Tattoo in New York City, has seen signs of weakening demand. After it was cleared to reopen from lockdowns in the summer of 2020, his business was slammed by customers flush with unemployment insurance payments and stimulus checks.

In mid-November of last year, Mr. Andersson started getting calls from clients who had booked daylong tattoo sessions, saying they could only afford shorter ones or pulling out altogether. Mr. Andersson, who specializes in tattoo projects that often take five or six all-day sessions to complete, had 15 cancellations for full-day slots in December.

"In my 15 years doing this, I've never seen that—people calling up and saying they don't have the money to spend right now or can only afford an hour because their current situation is pretty bad," he said.

For now, First Class Tattoo isn't likely to slash prices because the baseline level of demand remains strong. Some 250 clients are still on the wait list.

Also weighing on many consumers: The rapid increase in rates in the past year, tied to Fed tightening, has pushed the cost of all types of debt higher.

Mortgage rates reached a 20-year high last fall. Some 57% of consumers were concerned about making housing payments in the fourth quarter, according to a survey by Freddie Mac, up from 48% in the third quarter.

The increases are gradually starting to slow down consumer spending, though it might take a while before the effect is fully realized.

"We're probably going to have higher interest rates around for quite a while. You would think eventually that would dampen consumption, although that we haven't had the full effect yet," said Harvard University economist Kenneth Rogoff.

Credit-card balances were up 15% on the year in the third quarter, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the largest increase in more than two decades.

Additionally, tens of millions of Americans are set to start or resume making payments on student loans later this year, after the Supreme Court rules on President Biden's student-debt cancellation plan. Payments have been frozen since March 2020, and are scheduled to begin again 60 days after litigation is resolved or the program is implemented.

Many taxpayers will get smaller refunds when they file their returns in the coming months because Congress didn't extend the breaks put in place at the height of the pandemic.

Most Americans who lose their jobs can expect unemployment payments for six months or less, at a fraction of their former paychecks, the same as before pandemic programs kicked in. Pandemic programs allowed Americans to receive unemployment payments for as long as 18 months, and in some cases paid workers more than their paychecks.

The previously generous jobless benefits and direct federal payments to households caused the share of income Americans save every month to hit new highs in 2020. Since then, the saving rate has fallen to roughly 3% of monthly income, from more than 30% at the start of lockdowns. In 2019, the year before the pandemic, the rate was 8.8%.

The large stock-market declines over the past year also alarmed consumers, including Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Sara Laor, who is 57 years old. Ms. Laor said the declines depleted the holdings in her 401(k) and IRA accounts by nearly 40%.

Over the past year, her family has had to dip into their savings to pay for essential car and plumbing repairs. They are putting off other expenses, like buying a new car, and have given up ordering in meals.

She's trying to spend more cautiously, shunning recipes involving pricey eggs and buying more canned food.

"Everything I do just feels like I'm a lot poorer: Can I do this or can I do that?" she said.

U.S. factories, shippers and importers are pulling back, a sign they anticipate less demand from Americans in the months ahead.

	<p>Inbound volumes at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach in California were down 20.1% in December from a year earlier, and have been behind 2019 levels since August. A little over a year ago, backlogs at ports were drawing President Biden's attention.</p> <p>Nicholas Hobbs, chief operating officer of J.B. Hunt Transport Services Inc., which manages truck and rail shipments, said the company has seen demand fall off for big and bulky products, including appliances, furniture and exercise equipment—although off-price retailers with discounted inventory are shipping more.</p> <p>Jazzlyn Millberry, 33, has been looking for big ways to make cuts. One day last fall, her banking app informed her that the cost of one month's groceries and household goods for her family of four had risen to \$900, from about \$600 or \$700.</p> <p>"I find myself now going to three or four different grocery stores just to get the best deals on things to save on costs," said Ms. Millberry, a health-insurance claims analyst in Pickerington, Ohio.</p> <p>On one recent outing, she stopped at Kroger for eggs and meat, Aldi for produce, Sam's Club for her children's snacks, and Target for toilet paper.</p> <p>Even as she has cut back on groceries, restaurants, hairstyling and facials, her credit-card balances have grown in the past several months. She said she started making only the minimum required payment on her credit cards.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Sketchy SSNs landed billions Covid aid?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/sketchy-social-security-numbers-possibly-landed-billions-in-covid-aid-11675124163?mod=hp_listb_pos3
GIST	<p>The U.S. government likely awarded more than \$5 billion in emergency pandemic loans to applicants that used questionable and unverified Social Security numbers, a government watchdog said, in the latest example of potential fraud from Covid-19 relief initiatives.</p> <p>The Pandemic Response Accountability Committee, an oversight panel that monitors pandemic-related government spending, said Monday that it had identified 69,323 loan receivers who had used Social Security numbers that weren't issued legitimately or didn't match other information. That is a sign, the panel said in a report, that the government loans might have gone to organizations that didn't deserve them or had requested aid fraudulently, a finding that a House oversight panel might discuss at a Wednesday hearing about waste and fraud in pandemic spending.</p> <p>The watchdog said in the report that it would continue to investigate the "potential fraud and identity theft" along with law-enforcement agencies including the Justice Department's Covid-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force.</p> <p>During the pandemic's early months in 2020 much of the U.S. economy came to a standstill as people stayed home to avoid catching the coronavirus and because of mandated business shutdowns in many states. Amid fears of an economic collapse, Congress passed and then-President Trump signed trillions in economic aid in March 2020 and afterward that provided stimulus checks to Americans, loans to businesses, and additional unemployment payments as well as other economic measures. President Biden also signed a coronavirus aid package, valued at \$1.9 trillion, into law in March 2021.</p> <p>The report released on Monday focused on two programs aimed at providing assistance to small businesses.</p> <p>The Small Business Administration provided nearly \$1.2 trillion in assistance to small businesses and their employees through two efforts, the Economic Injury Disaster Loan program and the Paycheck Protection</p>

[Program](#), the watchdog said. Many of the loans don't have to be paid back if certain benchmarks are met, such as keeping workers employed.

The committee worked with the Social Security Administration to analyze Social Security numbers from more than 33 million applicants to the two programs. It found that \$5.4 billion in loans were given to 69,323 applicants whose information didn't match government data. That amounts to 0.45% of the total amount of loans that were given out.

The group found an additional 175,768 applicants who used seemingly sketchy information to apply for but who weren't given pandemic loans.

The Small Business Administration said it was committed to tackling identity theft and other types of fraud.

The potentially questionable applicants could stem from nicknames, data errors, typographical errors or other issues and aren't proof of fraud.

The House Committee on Oversight and Accountability plans to conduct a hearing on Wednesday about waste and fraud in pandemic spending.

The report is the latest example of government aid potentially being misused. Potential criminals [stole an estimated \\$45.6 billion](#) by making fraudulent unemployment-insurance claims meant for people laid off during the pandemic, the Labor Department's inspector general's office said in September.

Urgency to provide timely pandemic relief could have led to an increased susceptibility to fraud and less verification, the panel said.

Since early 2020, the economy has roared back, marking one of its fastest economic recoveries, as companies have brought back workers and at-home consumers have saved more and bought new sofas, televisions and other goods. However, that demand contributed to supply-chain challenges and a decades-high rate of inflation.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Views: Homeland risks, threats 2023
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/security-challenges-in-the-year-ahead-an-hstoday-expert-symposium/
GIST	<p>The threat landscape has expanded and evolved across cyberspace, critical infrastructure, biological threats, and more as a dedicated team of security professionals across various agencies and disciplines confronts new threat actors, worsening natural disasters, immigration challenges, global instability, threats to election security, drug and human trafficking, and more. As we move further into 2023, Homeland Security Today asked our editorial leaders and experts to share their thoughts on security challenges in the year ahead.</p> <p>Bob Kolaksy Former Assistant Director for the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and leader of the National Risk Management Center; Senior Vice President for Critical Infrastructure at Exiger, LLC</p> <p>Last Fall, I wrote about the need for a Homeland Security Risk Register given the range of strategic risks facing the homeland. In 2023, at the top of those risks is the linkage between mis-, dis-, and malinformation and domestic violent extremism. The fraying of the social compact in the United States, coupled with alternative views of accurate information and political tensions, has put the DVE threat at the highest level of the "homeland security era" and presents novel challenges to DHS and the homeland security enterprise. Combine this with access to weapons of mass harm, and you have a significant challenge for communities.</p>

This threat of violence could manifest itself not only in tragedies such as what we have seen in communities around the country involving mass shootings – most recently Monterey Park – but also in renewed pursuit of higher-end weapons by extremists, to include novel explosives and incendiary devices and targeting of critical infrastructure to achieve political effects of targeting. The trending in this direction seems pretty clear at this stage.

Support for community-led engagements to reduce the threat of targeted violence is desperately needed to mitigate this risk; so, too, is enhanced soft- and hard-target protection efforts. Following on “The Twitter Files” there is also a need for a more transparent paradigm of government interaction with social media companies and accountability for promotion of violence. It’s hard to see Congress leading the way on reform but homeland security and law enforcement professionals need additional tools if they are going to keep communities and critical infrastructure secure.

Brock Long

Former Federal Emergency Management Administrator; Executive Chairman, Hagerty Consulting

Today, the threats we face are both natural and manmade and are increasing in complexity, frequency, and magnitude; and, unfortunately, no community is spared. While the prominence and professionalism of emergency management has also changed, the frequency of events has also rapidly expanded and stretched the collective capabilities of our industry and our partners. As our nation’s threat landscape continues to evolve, it begs the question whether the current Stafford Act framework for major disaster declarations and workforce levels will allow us to be successful in the future. A major concern is that while the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is already overloaded by mother nature’s fury, the agency has also become responsible for responding to non-Stafford Act disasters, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, to meet the challenges associated with this change, disaster preparedness, response, and recovery must be a shared responsibility – all levels of government, private industry, non-governmental/nonprofit organizations, and the public all have a role to play to ensure we are ready for the next hazard we may face. Additionally, other federal government agencies should be equipped to handle the changing threat environment as well to reduce the continued reliance on FEMA.

The vulnerability of our nation’s infrastructure is also concerning to emergency managers. After a catastrophic incident, communities are often at risk of losing connectivity to critical infrastructure which serve as lifelines to the continuous operation of critical business and government functions that, if left inoperable, can jeopardize people’s safety and security. Once a severe disruption takes place, response personnel need to be able to identify the highest cross-sector priorities to allocate scarce personnel and resources. This prioritization effort is a shared responsibility between emergency managers and their critical infrastructure partners – public or private. This is particularly relevant when it comes to [grid security and energy resilience](#). While many emergency managers and grid operators alike recognize that, during the response phase of a disaster, restoring power as soon as possible solves many problems across the other critical infrastructure sectors, both parties must continue to leverage existing tools and resources to better prepare for the next incident they may face.

Additionally, we think beyond natural disasters and into the manmade space with the very real threat of cybersecurity. If a catastrophic cyber incident were to take place, emergency managers would likely play an incident management role, but what would that role be? Additionally, if the damage to critical infrastructure from a cyber incident jeopardized life safety and security, would that rise to the level of a major disaster? These important questions must be considered as we look beyond the traditional scope of emergency management to address the issues threatening the greater security of our homeland.

Lee Kair

Former Assistant Administrator for Security Operations and Head of Contracting Activity, Transportation Security Administration; Principal at The Chertoff Group

What should law enforcement, first responders, or others involved on the frontlines of homeland security be aware of? There’s a growing concern about the weaponization of critical infrastructure. We are seeing it

with the electric grid attacks, as well as in water and pipeline infrastructure. In Africa and Europe, we've seen the weaponization of food supplies and that is something that could also happen domestically.

What is the No. 1 challenge before DHS as an agency? The hyperfocus on immigration is the immediate challenge at DHS and it distracts from the other important missions within the department.

While leadership continues to address immigration, they must also ensure that sister agencies remain in focus for budget and policy initiatives.

Processing the mass numbers of immigrants spreads Border Patrol agents thin and detracts from their ability to also interdict drug and human trafficking.

Pete Gaynor

Former Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Administration and Acting Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security; Senior Vice President and Director, National Resilience, Response, and Recovery Programs, GEI Consultants

Water Security: In America, we don't think twice about turning on the faucet and having clean water pour out. We take for granted that we will wake up each day and have access to clean, fresh water. But Earth has a growing water problem. Nearly three-quarters of the planet's surface is covered in water, but our water ecosystems are being challenged. The climate is changing, and weather patterns are becoming increasingly less predictable. The demand for water is increasing as population growth means a corresponding need for more food, more energy, and more industry. Some countries are placing a much-higher demand on water than others: the average American uses 156 gallons of water per day. In contrast, residents of Mali, Africa, use only three gallons a day.

Any day of the week, you can read about water stress in communities, big and small, across the United States. One state experiences flooding (too much water) while another area experiences drought (too little water). Some communities are subject to water rationing or have failing water infrastructure. Other areas are dealing with reduced energy production due to a lack of water. The demand for agriculture is increasing, but reduced irrigation threatens the crops. There is even a lack of access to clean water in some communities, which directly correlates to controlling the outbreak of disease. All of these issues continue to be more commonplace and troubling, highlighting how out-of-balance and vulnerable our water ecosystems have become.

If we don't start making changes, we'll find ourselves living under extreme water stress. While it might be hard to imagine what that means, you don't need a crystal ball. To see what a community under these conditions looks like, we only need to look at North Africa or to the Middle East. In the ongoing conflicts of these regions, many disputes are tied to water access. If Americans want to avoid water stress and potential disputes, we need to do more to proactively regulate and promote policies that improve the management and conservation of water in the United States. Although the current administration has invested in water infrastructure improvement, it's only a start. Water insecurity respects no border, physical or political. Attempting to isolate ourselves from this problem undercuts all resilience goals.

It's imperative that we focus on minimizing both the social disruption the lack of water brings and water-related disasters, which come with predictable increased costs. Simply stated, water security cannot be ignored. It is fundamentally intertwined with human security.

Sandra L. Stosz

U.S. Coast Guard Vice Admiral (ret.), former Deputy Commandant for Mission Support, former Superintendent of the United States Coast Guard Academy

I work in the leadership space, and when asked about the biggest challenges confronting our nation, I think of those that require character-centered leadership to overcome. Heavy on my mind as we enter 2023 is the United States' fading national identity.

Our nation is built upon a firm foundation of governing documents and institutions, and is held together by a strong national identity composed of inalienable rights and shared values. The Declaration of Independence, adopted in July 1776, promised Americans three inalienable rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In September, 1787, our Founding Fathers gave us the Constitution, thereafter supplemented by the Bill of Rights, which united the colonies and people of the new nation.

An Immigrant Nation

America is an immigrant nation, from the time the first people arrived on our shores from where humankind originated in the heart of Africa. The first European settlers fled religious and other oppression. In more modern times, immigrants from all over the world have landed on our shores by the millions, seeking a better life in a new and promising land. In the early 20th century, those arriving from Europe and beyond were greeted in New York Harbor by Lady Liberty. They put forth great effort to assimilate into their new homeland, learning the language and adapting to a new culture. They wanted to be Americans.

When America or her allies were threatened, Americans from all walks of life answered the call to serve their nation. The attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, which precipitated U.S. engagement in World War II, and the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001, which led to the Global War on Terrorism, are but two examples of Americans uniting around shared values and focused on a common purpose. On a more local level, Americans rallied to support each other during the natural disasters of recent years, and the COVID crisis. For most of our history, America has been strong because of our shared national identity.

The Decline of Civility

In more recent years, America has become ever more divided, with Americans becoming increasingly uncivil. A more diverse populace naturally results in a wider range of perspectives. But rather than respectfully seeking to understand those with differing views, people instead seek to undermine them. Instead of respectful debate, we're devolving into disrespectful encounters, and that weakens us as a society.

A Call for Action

Diversity should be a strength, but for people with different views to get along, they must compromise. Compromise requires humility and respect. Those are powerful personal core values that can help us reunite our nation around our shared American values.

The world is a disrupted and dangerous place. We face global challenges such as climate change, conflict between nations, and human displacement. Now more than ever, our nation needs leaders of character, at all levels, who have the ability to unite Americans around a common purpose and shared values. Only with that kind of leadership will we be able to restore our national identity and be capable of doing our part to make our country and our world a safer place.

Steve Karoly

Former Acting Assistant Administrator for the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) Office of Requirements and Capabilities Analysis; Executive Vice President of K2 Security Screening Group

Transportation security, and specifically aviation security, remains a daunting challenge for our national security leaders. The multitude of transportation modalities and systems around the country are, and need to be, accessible, easy to use, and efficient. Unfortunately, satisfying those three requirements can open the door for bad actors whose intent is to carry out heinous acts. The transportation and aviation security enterprise has worked hard over the past 20 years to ensure security mechanisms are in place to deter and defend against those bad actors. However, as we enter 2023, a number of challenges remain.

- Deploying the latest advancements in security technology across the transportation security enterprise while operating within a limited budget.
- Balancing the need to deploy the most effective biometric capabilities throughout the transportation security enterprise to verify and validate identities (travelers and transportation workers) and ultimately provide access, while also maintaining a person's privacy needs.

- Addressing the security risks of an increasing level of unmanned aircraft operations in the airspace and developing effective detection capabilities and countermeasures to protect critical infrastructure from attacks through the use of drones.
- Developing more cost-effective and efficient ways to screen all inbound and outbound freight and cargo on international passenger and all-cargo aircraft.
- Improving coordination between federal, state, and local homeland security and law enforcement personnel, and among public and private stakeholders, to enhance public area security and effectively deter and respond to criminal and terrorist acts targeting public areas of transportation facilities.
- Enhancing the nation's capabilities against cybersecurity threats to aircraft, air traffic control systems, and airports.

Ajit Maan

Founder and CEO, Narrative Strategies; Professor of Practice at the Center for the Future of War and Member of the Brain Trust of the Weaponized Narrative Initiative at Arizona State University

A dangerous by-product of a cultural assumption in the U.S. is the cognitive habit of categorizing. The habit is dangerous to defense and Homeland Security as the threats we face don't easily fit into neat categories and we ought to abstain from trying to squish them in. Domestic and transnational are antiquated categories to impose upon terroristic acts and recruitment. And while the weight of our national security priorities has now shifted to great power competition, a categorical distinction between great power competition and terrorism are anachronisms as well. Our adversaries don't make those distinctions. Nor should we.

Great powers use terrorism as a tool to serve their foreign policy and have even crossed the borders of the U.S. to dispatch their critics on American soil. Is that domestic or foreign?

Groups like the so-called Islamic State and al-Qaeda are busy recruiting audiences across borders and they are often state-sponsored – major and minor. Decapitation hasn't proven effective in undermining these groups. At best it has slowed them by a few weeks while they continue to inspire support even from civilians even on U.S. soil. We cannot continue to consider these and groups like them regional threats. Among the third- and fourth-order effects they are causing is the displacement of large populations, which in turn results in destabilization across borders.

Charles Werner

Retired Charlottesville, Va., Fire Chief; Director of DroneResponders Public Safety Alliance and Chair of the National Council on Public Safety UAS

First, drones are one of the big challenges ahead. From the experiences within the United States and abroad. Drones have become an effective tool to drop contraband into prisons, carry drugs and explosives, support illegal entry across borders, interfere with law enforcement operations and even aid in the escape from a prison. The use of commercial off-the-shelf drones used in the Ukraine war has demonstrated how effective drones can be used as a threat. This problem is compounded by the indecision by Congress to extend the detect-and-mitigate authorities to state and local law enforcement and the private sector. Cybersecurity will remain a major concern from the threat of hacking critical infrastructure/systems, electric grid and vulnerability to all companies from ransomware. The biggest and hardest factor to overcome is the vulnerability from people being lazy and not following cybersecurity procedures. Human behavior is the hardest thing to change.

The scariest challenge ahead comes from the breakdown of the legal system. Cashless bail creates a revolving door of offenders, often violent. The blindness to shoplifting, allowance of smash and grabs and unwillingness to prosecute will continue to promote chaos and deterioration of big cities. The attack on law enforcement officers with a 34 percent increase in officers killed. The removal of liability protection rights for law enforcement, cashless bail and defunding police will continue to drive police staffing shortages resulting in increased crime. The massive influx of illegal border crossings overwhelm Customs

and Border Patrol and law enforcement in border states, the increase in fentanyl across the border killing 100,000 people/year in the U.S. and the devastation from human trafficking.

Antonio Villafana

Former Chief Information Officer for the DHS Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) Office

Quantum Computing: A new year, a new era of challenges for those responsible for safeguarding our assets and protecting our communities. The persistent and rapidly evolving cyber threat landscape for 2023 and beyond will be fueled by new technological advances and discoveries in 2022. Current efforts to improve AI that can autonomously detect and respond to cyber threats may not be enough to keep out sponsored nation-state actors using quantum computing. Quantum computing has the potential of pioneering more unique and innovative methods of attacking our networks.

Ransomware: At the end of 2022 there was a noticeable shift in how cyber criminals are executing ransomware attacks. Cyber criminals are shifting away from the traditional encryption jail to the more direct approach of data deletion threats. Technological advances have equipped us with the ability to quickly thwart cyber ransomware attacks; however, cyber criminals pivoted very quickly and are trying a more forceful approach to meeting their demands by threatening to destroy data. Given current global financial instability and layoffs, I think we will see a rise in ransomware attacks, which may include more attacks on bigger targets such as power grids and water supplies.

John Sullivan

Lieutenant (Retired), Los Angeles Sheriff's Department; Instructor, Safe Communities Institute, University of Southern California

The threat envelope for 2023 is diverse and complex. Four major themes — Division, Disinformation, Disorder, and Convergence — dominate the current and emerging security horizon. All of these themes are multi-dimensional and demand whole-of-society approaches since government action is not enough to stabilize the threat potentials. These potentials may present themselves in a range of scenarios, some familiar and some novel. Hybrid threats and action by foreign powers including Russia and China exploit and exacerbate these risks. Division includes the extreme political polarization resulting in enmity and challenges to political institutions and the rule of law. Identity politics and cultural wars have become means of dividing the nation into competing factions. Internal division expresses itself through dysfunctional politics and drives political violence. This threat became a reality with the January 6, 2021, insurrection and the 2020 plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, as well as attacks on members of Congress and local politicians. Societal division also includes extreme reaction on abortion, LGBTQ issues, COVID-19 response, and climate change.

Disinformation including propaganda, the promulgation of “fake news,” and conspiracy theories, such as QAnon, over social media amplifies societal division to fuel disorder. This disruption of social integrity is increasingly part of a global ecosystem as seen in suspected links between the January 6, 2021, conspiracy and the assault on Brazil's presidential palace, supreme court and legislature on January 8, 2023. Disorder ranges from subverting legitimate political dissent to suborning sedition and political violence by armed groups such as the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers. Domestic violent extremism potentials including terrorism is on the rise. Currently, the extreme right is responsible for most of these acts, but the extreme left and single-issue groups can be expected to join the fray. This will be complicated by sympathizers with key security agencies demanding enhanced counterintelligence capacity.

Convergence is the final theme. It connects the previous four with other geosocial and technological trends. The Ukraine War exposes the potential for weaponized artisanal drones to become key factors in combat. Transnational criminals including Mexican cartels and Brazilian gangs have also embraced drones. Drone swarms exploiting revolutions in artificial intelligence (AI) may become a near-term reality threatening battlefield and critical infrastructure alike. The Ukraine War also exposed the potential for Russian-sponsored terrorism, including links between Russian hybrid warfare and global right-wing extremists. The use of Chinese Overseas Police Stations throughout the world demonstrates another thread of influence operations challenging human rights and illustrating the hybrid dimension of great power

competition. Add to these the threats and opportunities provided by the emerging AI revolution, quantum computing, synthetic biology, increased embrace of cybercrime transnational organized crime, and the stresses from climate change. Threat convergence remains a major theme for 2023. Convergence among actors — criminals and states — is joined by the convergence of physical and cyberspace and traditional and emerging threats. This convergence presents the potential for ‘polycrisis’ where several converging crises within multiple global systems challenge response. Failure to anticipate or mitigate interconnected risks could drive conflict up to and including international armed conflict. Criminal enterprises can be expected to exploit the seams between intergovernmental and societal response. Anticipatory intelligence and collaborative, adaptive response are needed to address these potentials.

Mahmut Cengiz

Associate Professor and Research Faculty with Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) and the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University

Global terrorism has been listed as one of the top security issues since the September 11 attacks, and the U.S. approach against it has received criticism for being overfocused on terrorism and not giving sufficient attention to the expansion of Russia and China’s influence worldwide. On the other hand, the most recent common approach suggests jihadist groups are confined to their origin countries and are incapable of conducting attacks targeting the western world. However, the activities of jihadist terrorist groups and far-right extremists in 2022 indicated that the U.S. should continue to give its serious approach to counterterrorism. These groups again have the capacity to attack western countries. For example, ISIS-Core in Syria and Iraq and its regional affiliates, such as [ISIS-K](#) in Afghanistan, ISIS-GS in the Sahel, and ISIS-West Africa in the Chad Basin, were the [perpetrators](#) of thousands of attacks targeting the United Nations missions, state institutions, military, and law enforcement in 2022. Correspondingly, al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups were actively [involved](#) in terrorist attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Syria. In addition, they have extended their influence to the neighboring countries of the Sahel region. Both ISIS and al-Qaeda lost their leaders in military operations in 2022, but it made a limited impact on their capacities. Therefore, 2023 will continue to record violent acts by ISIS and al-Qaeda groups worldwide.

The Biden administration prioritizes promoting democracy worldwide and emphasizes how critical it is to tackle regional and global corruption. As specified in the dirty entanglement theory of Dr. Louise Shelley, crime, corruption, and terrorism are entangled, meaning that corruption facilitates terrorism, and terrorist groups are involved in criminal activities to generate revenue and fund their activities. Countries with the most terrorist attacks and the highest corruption perfectly match each other. Corrupt and non-democratic regimes in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia will continue to harbor these jihadist groups, and it is crucial for the U.S. government to approach terrorism in the context of dirty entanglement theory, which will effectively impact the war against global terrorism.

Self-radicalization has been another issue in the western world. In addition to American- or European-born individuals under the influence of radicalizing effects of Salafi jihadism, far-right ideologies based on conspiracy theories and the superiority of a specific ethnicity or race have been influential in the West. These groups that emulate the jihadist groups’ modus operandi are globally networked and capable of targeting their scapegoated “enemies” as well as the government. Self-radicalized individuals will actively be on the stage in 2023.

Lastly, the world has seen a new way of seeking international influence. Intelligence groups actively involved in politics and serving their governments’ interests during the Cold War have been replaced by so-called [private armies](#) operating for today’s authoritarian regimes. Turkey’s SADAT and Russia’s Wagner Groups are two organizations in this context. The Wagner Group is already active in more than 12 countries in the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa. It seems to be providing security for the local governments in these regions but is serving the interests of the Russian government. In 2023, the Wagner Group will continue its activities and aim to expand its influence in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. The group, due to its ongoing activities and threat, may end up in the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organizations List.

Paul Cobaugh

Vice President at Narrative Strategies; expert in non-kinetic aspects of conflict

One of our most significant threat streams for the coming few years is the nexus between our most dangerous form of U.S. domestic extremism and its global movement, often hailing from Putin and related far-right partners. Over the past few years, and due to ignoring this threat stream during the generation we spent operating against a global wave of Islamic extremism and similar efforts, RWE/Right-Wing-Extremism has become our primary and most lethal domestic terror threat.

Far-right movements globally have clearly demonstrated their synchronicity of tactics, messaging and sustainability. This threat is significantly higher to the unity of the RBIO/Rules-based, International Order that has played such a powerful role in supporting Ukraine's defense. Blending similar issues to RWE, like authoritarianism, dictatorship, despotism, populism and rabid nationalism, only compounds the threat to U.S. progress toward achieving the objectives in our NSS/National Security Strategy.

At some point, the U.S. must address this issue resolutely or risk global, collective security, which also plays such a significant role in U.S. national security. We can no longer afford to ignore this threat as being "too political." It must be treated with the same focus as the generation the world collaborated on Islamic extremism.

Uran Botobekov

Expert on the Central Asian Salafi-Jihadi Movement, research fellow, and a member of the Advisory Board of EU Modern Diplomacy

Forecasting the threat of Islamic violent extremism and terrorism against the United States for the year ahead is a thankless task when, on the background of a bloody war on Ukraine, Moscow is trying to exploit the Islamic religion to build up its aggressive propaganda in order to damage democratic values and the security of the U.S. and the West as a whole.

Regarding the threat of the global Salafi-Jihadi terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, these challenges will persist and develop depending on the political and economic crises and instability in the regions of their presence. Despite losing their leaders last year, both transnational Sunni jihadi groups, which see the U.S. as their "main enemy and great evil," will seek every opportunity to launch terror attacks against U.S. interests overseas and its strategic allies in the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and the African continent.

However, as an expert, I would like to draw DHS' attention to how Putin's unprovoked, brutal and unjustified attack and full invasion of Ukraine is creating the foundation of a future threat of Islamist extremism against the U.S. and the EU. Russian top officials from Putin to his Chechen "foot soldier" Ramzan Kadyrov are deliberately spreading anti-American narratives and distorted Islamic thoughts, deliberately inciting religious hatred and anti-Western enmity among the Muslim population of the North Caucasus and Central Russia. This is a very dangerous direction because Russia's propaganda uses the Islamic religion as a political tool against its Western competitors, which over time can radicalize and transform into a terrorist threat.

For instance, following the bloody invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin amplified conspiracy theories blaming the U.S. for inciting the Russia-Ukraine crisis and claiming the U.S. produced biological weapons in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Georgia that could be used against the Slavic population of Russia.

The Muslim republics of Russia, such as Dagestan, Chechnya, Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, as well as the Central Spiritual Muslim Board of Russia, in accordance with the Kremlin's religious strategy, [adopted fatwa](#) (decree by an Islamic religious leader) on "holy jihad" in Ukraine, inciting anti-Western religious hatred. Justifying Putin's bloody invasion of Ukraine, the fatwas portrayed the U.S. as "Iblis' henchman" (devils in Islamic mythology) and accused them of aiding Ukrainian terrorism, international injustice, perverted depravity, and attempts to destroy Islamic identity and Muslim family values.

Thus, Russia instills in the Muslim population of the post-Soviet space a sense of religious hatred toward the U.S., which in the future, under favorable circumstances, may move from propaganda to practical actions. Theologically defining Putin's war in Ukraine as a "holy jihad" and the Muslims killed in it as "Shaheed" (martyr), the Grand Muftis of the Russian regions not only justify the bloodiest war of the 21st century but also push the country's 20 million Muslim population onto the path of religious radicalism. While ISIS radical Salafists issue takfir (excommunication) to "protect the purity of Islam," pro-Kremlin muftis have adopted anti-Ukraine and anti-U.S. fatwas on holy jihad in the name of Islam. In this way, Russia is sowing the seeds of anti-American religious hatred, the fruits of which will ripen in the not-too-distant future.

It is quite possible that all these conspiracy theories, Islamic fatwas, and anti-American narratives of Russian propaganda could be used to commit violence against U.S. citizens and its democratic institutions. Anti-American Khutbah (sermon) speeches of pro-Putin imams and religious clerics may inspire lone-wolf terrorists in the West. It should be expected that the more the Russian economy cracks under the weight of Western sanctions in circumstances of international isolation and the slippage of its so-called "special operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine," the more desperately it will try to exploit the Islamic factor against the U.S.

In this way, Russia unwittingly begins to copy the bitter experience of Iran, which at the state level uses Islam for political purposes to incite anti-American hatred among its supporters and religious radicals. The modern history of the Islamic Republic shows that the use of Islam for political purposes is always fraught with grave consequences, which will push its followers to violent actions and lone-wolf attacks.

It should not be forgotten that lone wolves among post-Soviet immigrants, inspired by violent Salafi-Jihadi ideology but having no specific ties to global terrorist groups (financial, operational, or other specific tasks), carried out high-profile terror attacks in the U.S.:

- The Boston Marathon bombing was carried out by brothers [Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev](#) from Kyrgyzstan on April 15, 2013.
- A domestic terrorist attack committed by a migrant from Uzbekistan, [Sayfullo Saipov](#), in New York, killed 8 civilians on 31 October 2017;
- Another [Uzbek migrant, Ulugbek Kodirov](#), tried to kill even President Barack Obama in July 2011 and was sentenced to 15 years in prison.
- More than a [dozen Uzbek migrants](#) were charged with the attempt to provide material support to ISIS between 2012 and 2016 in the U.S., which is evidence of the growing [lone-wolves](#) among immigrants from Central Asia.

In conclusion, Russia's exploit of anti-American religious hatred in its asymmetric warfare against the West to inflict damage could have far-reaching consequences, from which it will suffer first. Either way, the U.S. must be ready to respond to any challenges from the direct threat of transnational Salafi-Jihadi terrorism to its sleeping lone wolves at home.

Ardian Shajkovci

Co-founder and Director of the American Counterterrorism Targeting and Resilience Institute

Trevor Bickford, 19, of Maine is currently facing federal charges for attacking NYPD officials in Times Square on [New Year's Eve](#). Preliminary investigations revealed Bickford became radicalized as recently as a month prior to the attack. He did not appear to be affiliated with any movement or terrorist group. He allegedly remained on the FBI terrorist watchlist after being tipped off by his family members about his militant jihadi viewpoints and the desire to join the [Taliban in Afghanistan](#). The pattern of stalking and attacking law enforcement among those espousing jihadi aspirations in some form or capacity is not confined to this particular attack. The cases of [Fareed Mumuni](#), [Awaid Chudhary](#), [Dzenan Camovic](#), and [Xavier Pelkey](#) in recent years come to mind.

Plausible explanations of the recent activities by homegrown wannabe jihadis are not confined to a single-factor explanation. Tendency and willingness to carry out terrorist attacks among those willing but unable to travel to conflict zones like Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan remains a relatively under-researched

phenomenon. At least in the case of Bickford — and perhaps several others mentioned above — the extent to which the frustration over inability to travel to conflict zones may have strengthened their extremist inclinations, potentially leading to violence at home, warrants further scrutiny. Additionally, vast swaths of IS and al-Qaeda-friendly territories in Africa — that seem to compensate for the loss of physical caliphate in Syria and Iraq — and the Taliban’s rapid conquest and expansion may have likely contributed to the perception among some of the reemergence and revitalization of militant jihadi agenda and prowess worldwide. Neither the allure of territorial holdings nor a direct tie with a terrorist group in Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan is perceived as necessary to engage in terrorist activities at home. In other instances, vulnerable cohorts include individuals who do not hold any ideology, or hold multiple ideologies (e.g., racially or politically motivated), and are simply driven by obsessions and impulses of violence.

The incessant surge of terrorist group propaganda inciting violence remains dangerous and detrimental, particularly in the context of individuals with complex needs and motivations. Terrorist groups like IS (IS-associated) and al-Qaeda (al-Qaeda associated) continue to share officially labeled or officially branded propaganda material. Websites and social media platforms operated by such groups remain widespread and unbridled, despite take-down efforts by governments and social media companies.

Technologies used by such groups are often deemed “basic” (e.g., bots) and generally serve as repositories of terrorist content on social media platforms. Complementary to law enforcement and intelligence-led efforts, monitoring of social media channels for terrorist content is necessary to discern current trends in the spread of terrorist content online and to understand the extent to which technologies exploited by such groups will likely remain powerful in influencing users towards a certain direction and affect the trendiness of a terrorist group messaging both online and offline.

Our communities have also become alert to the spread of disinformation by state actors like China and Russia. The disinformation campaigns dubbed “digital battlefield” by the Kremlin have proven crucial in its effort to speed up propaganda across foreign and domestic media outlets, ramped up by the digital technologies designed to facilitate the flow of information through a network of traditional media, social media channels (e.g., Telegram), sock-puppets, and [fake accounts](#). As the Kremlin-sponsored news outlets and social media continue to lose steam in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine information warfare in part due to shut down efforts by governments and social media companies, their disinformation campaigns continue to target pro-Russia audiences in Russia, the Russian speaking diaspora, and the [West](#).

The Kremlin’s disinformation ecosystem has become highly adaptive to the global information landscape, manifesting through smear media operations, covert and overt proxy media outlets. Case in point, created on February 24, 2022, a pro-Kremlin Telegram channel “Война с фейками” (“War on Fakes”) we too monitor at our center, has, as of January 16, 2023, amassed 765K-plus subscribers, with a weekly average post reach of 140K-plus. Its content is circulated and/or shared by 7K-plus Telegram channels. With its predominantly English- and Russian-language publications (website included), the channel generates significant amounts of propagandistic content, amplified by pro-Kremlin journalists, major pro-Russian media outlets and news agencies like RT, Tass News Agency, and RIA Novosti, and the Russian Foreign Ministry, among others. A January 14 post (“fact-checking,” real-time trope) addressing the Russian Armed Forces’ hit of a residential building in the Dnieper generated over 630K views and 10K-plus forwards and shares, respectively, and the engagement with the content keeps on growing as we speak.

Formally run and orchestrated disinformation campaigns particularly by state actors like China and Russia are becoming a norm. Governments and social media companies continue to demonstrate resolve in both exposing disinformation and building prevention capacities and long-term resilience to it. These promising measures and interventions must also account for complex hybrid traditional and social media environments, rapidly changing internet infrastructure, ever shifting user behavior online, and regulatory actions that often lag vis-a-vis fluid technological changes and transformations. Disinformation discernment and its impact among the general public also calls for concerted government, social media, and academia efforts to better understand and ultimately overcome [“definitional, methodological, and stewardship”](#) challenges associated with the expansion and propagation of disinformation.

HEADLINE	01/30 Last Boeing 747 leaves the factory
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/business/last-boeing-747-plane.html
GIST	<p>More than a half-century ago, Boeing unveiled the 747, a massive and striking airplane that captured the public imagination and brought air travel to the masses. The jet has been a workhorse since, ferrying passengers and cargo around the world. But its days are numbered: On Tuesday, Boeing plans to hand over the last 747 it will ever make.</p> <p>With a distinctive hump, the 747, nicknamed the “Queen of the Skies,” is perhaps the most widely recognizable commercial airplane ever built. The plane transformed air travel and became a symbol of American ingenuity. It could still be flying decades from now, a longevity that aviation historians said was testament to the work that engineers, designers and others put into repeatedly remaking the airplane.</p> <p>“It’s one of the great ones,” said Shea Oakley, who runs an aviation history consulting firm and is a former executive director of the Aviation Hall of Fame and Museum of New Jersey. “If you had to make a list of the 10 most important airplanes ever built since the Wright Flyer, the 747 needs to be on that list. It was a quantum leap.”</p> <p>The 747 is composed of about six million parts produced all over the world. But the final, awe-inspiring work of assembling them into an airplane was completed at a factory in Everett, Wash. That plant, generally regarded as the world’s largest building by volume, was built for the 747 in the 1960s. The plant has been used to make other planes, but it has remained home to the 747 down to the final one: No. 1,574.</p> <p>Seen from a distance, the specialists working on exposed sections of a 747 appear tiny, like miniature surgeons operating on parts of a blue whale. Often under bright, white lights and supported by lifts, rolling staircases and other structures, they install, arrange, assemble and test the guts and shell of the plane.</p> <p>Production of the last 747 started in September and was typical of how its predecessors were made. In one bay of the factory, workers constructed the wings, starting with the spars that serve as the backbones and then added parts called the ribs and skin. In another bay, they build sections of the body, or fuselage, and then added wiring, plumbing and hydraulics, said Steve Kopecki, director of manufacturing for the 747.</p> <p>Once the wings were ready, they were hoisted several stories high by a crane and moved into a bay sandwiched between where the wings and fuselage were built. There, they were attached to either side of a stub known as the center wing box. Next, the middle section of the fuselage was lowered and attached to the wings. Then, the front and back sections were lifted and moved into place on either side.</p> <p>“That’s the place where the airplane actually finally becomes an airplane,” Mr. Kopecki said.</p> <p>After the body sections were attached, the landing gear was installed and 14,000-pound counterweights were hung from the wings. Then, the plane was lowered from its supports and allowed to stand on its own, a major milestone.</p> <p>“If you’ve done that, there are many, many important steps behind you already,” Mr. Kopecki said. “And you have a very clear path of what lies ahead.”</p> <p>Soon after, flooring, lighting, walls, parts of the flight deck and other interior fixtures were installed. All of the airplane’s systems were tested. Near the end of assembly, the engines were added. Finally, the airplane was rolled out of the factory, through bay doors several stories high that could accommodate the airplane’s 225-foot wingspan.</p> <p>Outside, fuel systems and other features were checked and the plane embarked on a test flight, landing in Portland for a paint job before flying back. The plane and its systems continued to be evaluated. On Tuesday, it will be handed over to Atlas Air Worldwide, a cargo and passenger airline that will use it to haul goods.</p> <p>A troubled beginning</p>

The 747's long life is remarkable partly because its start was so uncertain.

Boeing began designing the airplane in the mid-1960s at the request of Pan American World Airways, a leading airline that [filed for bankruptcy protection in 1991](#). But even then, many people within Boeing were expecting the 747 to soon be supplanted by a supersonic jet the company was developing.

As a result, and to justify their investment, Boeing and Pan Am decided that the plane should be designed with passengers and freight in mind, a choice that would be crucial to its success and determine its unique shape. The designers wanted the nose to lift up so cargo could be loaded more easily. To make that possible, they placed the flight deck above the main cabin, rather than at the front of the plane, creating the 747's unusual hump.

Over the years, as engineers and designers worked on the plane, Boeing's financial situation dimmed. Airline orders were slowing and costs for the 747 and the supersonic jet, which the company would abandon in 1971, were soaring. Then, a crisis arrived.

Even as parts of the wing were being made, testing revealed that the load on the outside of the wing was greater than its structure could support. "This was more than a problem; it had the potential to be a showstopper!" Joe Sutter, who led the design of the airplane, wrote in a book, "747: Creating the World's First Jumbo Jet and Other Adventures From a Life in Aviation," which was written with Jay Spenser.

Some within the company argued that the wings would need to be wholly redesigned, which Mr. Sutter feared would be so expensive that it would kill the plane. Eventually, his team arrived at a cheaper, simpler solution that involved twisting the outside of the wings to adjust the distribution of pressure in flight. That worked and the airplane rolled out for testing in 1968.

The rise and fall

More than two dozen airlines were already committed to buying the 747 when it [was first shown to the public](#). In 1970, the 747 took its maiden commercial flight, ferrying more than 300 Pan Am passengers to London from New York.

It became an instant public sensation. The four-engine airplane was much larger than any other and could fit hundreds of people in rows with up to 10 seats across. The upper deck, reachable by a spiral staircase, hosted a luxurious lounge. American Airlines had a piano bar installed in the main cabin.

Orders started to flow in, bringing Boeing much-needed revenue. Owning a 747 became a status symbol for airlines. Some companies bought the airplane even though it didn't quite suit their needs.

The most important reason airlines bought the plane was that the 747 helped them cut costs. Because the airplane could carry so many more passengers in a single trip, airlines could sell tickets more cheaply, making air travel affordable to the masses.

Boeing produced several versions of the airplane in the 1970s and '80s for different uses and to improve how much it could carry and how far it could fly. In 1989, the company unveiled a major upgrade, the 747-400, which became the plane's best-selling model. Boeing sold more 747s in the 1990s than in any other decade.

But as popular as the airplane had become, the world was starting to move on.

Smaller, more efficient two-engine airplanes could now fly longer distances. Their smaller size meant airlines could offer direct international routes between smaller cities, [such as St. Louis and Frankfurt](#).

In the mid-90s, Boeing also introduced the 777, which was about as big as the 747. With only two engines, it was more advanced and efficient. A decade later, Boeing's main rival, Airbus, debuted the A380, which can carry more passengers than the 747. But Airbus struggled to sell the plane and [announced the end of production](#) in 2019.

Still, interest in the 747 lingered, particularly for cargo operations. In the early 2010s, Boeing introduced the last model, the 747-8, delivering about 50 passenger versions and more than 100 versions for carrying goods.

A long farewell

For many of the people who worked on the airplane, the delivery of the final 747 is a bittersweet moment. They are proud of their ties to the jet and sad to see its production end.

“You have an airplane that’s kind of done its duty for 50 years,” said Scott Pettersen, who spent nearly four decades as a mechanic on the 747 before retiring in 2016.

Mr. Petterson estimated that he helped to build more than 1,200 747s. His work focused on the middle portion of the jet, known as the 44 section. And he said he was fortunate to spend the final decade of his career alongside his son, Tyler, who worked on the front section.

But despite all that time with the airplane, Mr. Petterson said he had never traveled on one. “I would like to fly in a 747,” he said. “I’m sure it’s a great feeling.”

Some airlines still use the plane for passenger flights, including Lufthansa, Korean Air and Air China. But the 747 has increasingly fallen out of favor with many airlines and will probably end its life carrying cargo.

The last of the airplanes produced were all 747-8 freighters for Atlas Air, which operates the largest 747 fleet in the world and leases out airplanes and crews for cargo or passenger operations. The final 747 will be chartered by an Atlas customer, Kuehne+Nagel, one of the world’s largest transport companies, for use by its subsidiary, Apex Logistics.

For Atlas, the 747 remains an ideal choice because of its reliability, capacity and ability to fly huge amounts of goods between major cargo hubs, said John Dietrich, the company’s president and chief executive. And at least one early decision in the design of the plane continues to pay off.

“That nose-loading capability is going to serve the market well for decades to come,” he said.

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HEADLINE	01/30 US will not supply Ukraine F-16 fighter jets
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/30/joe-biden-says-us-wont-send-f-16-fighter-jets-ukra/
GIST	<p>President Biden on Monday said the U.S. will not supply Ukraine with F-16 fighter jets to assist in their ongoing fight with Russia, which is heading into its second year.</p> <p>“No,” Mr. Biden said when a reporter asked him if the U.S. would send the fighter jets to Ukraine.</p> <p>Mr. Biden also said he was unsure if he would visit Europe for the one-year anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials last week renewed their calls for the U.S. and Germany to provide them with F-16 fighter jets, which have been on the country’s wish list since the war began last year.</p> <p>The Biden administration has rebuffed such calls, saying that artillery, armor, and ground-based defense systems and tanks are more urgent needs because Ukraine must protect civilian infrastructure and repel Russian forces.</p> <p>Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said over the weekend Ukraine’s Western allies understand the need for planes capable of providing cover for tanks they have sent to the war-torn country.</p>

	<p>“We must show (our allies) the real picture of this war,” Mr. Podolyak said in remarks to the online video channel Freedom. “We must speak reasonably and tell them, for example, ‘This and this will reduce fatalities, this will reduce the burden on infrastructure. This will reduce security threats to the European continent, this will keep the war localized.’ And we are doing it.”</p> <p>Germany and the United States last week announced they would each send M1 Abrams tanks along with Bradley and Marder vehicles to Ukraine and train Ukrainian troops to operate them.</p> <p>That decision was a reversal after months of Mr. Biden insisting that the U.S. would not send Abrams tanks into Ukraine. He finally relented under pressure from Germany and other European partners.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 WHO: Covid global crisis at transition point
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/30/who-says-covid-19-remains-international-emergency/
GIST	<p>The World Health Organization said Monday that COVID-19 remains a global crisis, but it is at an “inflection” point and could transition from a hair-on-fire emergency to a manageable problem before the end of the year.</p> <p>WHO’s emergency committee recently said the virus remains a public health emergency of international concern.</p> <p>It is their highest alert level, though WHO said the designation won’t stick around forever.</p> <p>“We remain hopeful that in the coming year, the world will transition to a new phase in which we reduce hospitalizations and deaths to the lowest possible level, and health systems are able to manage COVID-19 in an integrated and sustainable way,” WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. “As we enter the fourth year of the pandemic, there is no doubt we are in a far better situation now than we were a year ago when the omicron wave was at its peak.”</p> <p>WHO said too many places are struggling to stand up vaccines and treatments, and there were more than 170,000 COVID-19-related deaths reported globally in the last eight weeks. Progress in reducing virus deaths has been offset to some degree by rising problems in China, where the communist government reversed its draconian control measures and let the virus run rampant.</p> <p>DeSantis’ bid to root out sexually explicit content in schools attacked as book-banning scheme “In addition, surveillance and genetic sequencing have declined globally, making it more difficult to track known variants and detect new ones,” WHO said in a statement.</p> <p>In some ways, the WHO’s posture matches the policies deployed by the Biden administration.</p> <p>President Biden famously declared the pandemic to be over in a “60 Minutes” interview last year. At the same time, his administration is proceeding cautiously, using federal spending power to purchase virus-fighting tools and extending emergency powers that, among other things, allow people to remain in Medicaid insurance coverage.</p> <p>If WHO lifts its highest alert level, it could be the closest thing the world sees to a declaration that the pandemic is over. Scientists say there is no formal mechanism for no longer calling COVID-19 a pandemic, so it is more of a state of mind or consensus view that tracks with the WHO’s decision on the public health emergency.</p> <p>Dr. Tedros said while he is optimistic about a brighter future, humans are stuck with the fast-evolving pathogen for the foreseeable future, so they must fight complacency and expand the use of vaccines and available treatments.</p>

	“Do not underestimate this virus,” Dr. Tedros said in Geneva, Switzerland. “It has and will continue to surprise us, and it will continue to kill unless we do more to get health tools to people that need them and to comprehensively tackle misinformation.”
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HEADLINE	01/30 Hotels recover revenue, still staff shortages
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/30/hotels-recover-revenue-staff-shortages-linger/
GIST	<p>The hotel industry this year will surpass pre-pandemic levels of demand and room revenue but struggle with lingering pandemic-era staff shortages, according to annual projections released Monday.</p> <p>Total revenue per available room will increase from \$170.35 billion in 2019 to \$197.48 billion this year, the American Hotel and Lodging Association reported.</p> <p>And room demand is expected to increase from 1.29 billion occupied room nights in 2019 to 1.3 billion this year, according to the trade group’s 2023 State of the Hotel Industry Report.</p> <p>Record travel last summer has accelerated the industry’s recovery from COVID-19, said AHLA President and CEO Chip Rogers.</p> <p>“Three years after the unprecedented hardships our industry faced due to the pandemic, hotels continue to make significant strides toward recovery,” Mr. Rogers said in a statement.</p> <p>Other areas of recovery continue to lag, according to the report.</p> <p>The AHLA predicts average hotel occupancy will reach 63.8% this year, two percentage points short of the 65.9% rate in 2019. And hotels are projected to employ 2.09 million workers this year, down from 2.35% in 2019.</p> <p>In 2020, COVID-19 quarantines drove U.S. hotel revenues to a record-low \$85.5 billion in revenues, a 50% drop from 2019.</p> <p>Past AHLA projections found the industry \$59 billion below 2019 revenue levels in 2021 and \$20 billion short last year.</p> <p>The industry has struggled to replace frontline hospitality and food service workers who did not return from furloughs during COVID quarantines. Some hotels “hired” robots and installed automated kiosks last year to replace human housekeepers and servers who switched to work-from-home careers.</p> <p>Things have since improved to the point that “we are not hearing from guests or hoteliers anymore about hiccups at check-in or housekeeping,” said Yannis Moati, CEO of the New York City-based online booking agency Hotels By Day.</p> <p>“It’s much better now, but not as good and smooth as 2019 was,” Mr. Moati told The Washington Times.</p> <p>A tight labor market could limit the hotel industry’s expected recovery this year, added Sean Higgins, an analyst at the libertarian Competitive Enterprise Institute.</p> <p>“It will have to service those guests while employing about 260,000 fewer hotel workers than it did in 2019,” Mr. Higgins said in an email. “Without the workers, the quality of service suffers and guests will notice that.”</p> <p>Higher wages designed to attract more workers also add to costs and force hotels to charge higher rates, he added.</p>

	“Short of hiking wages, it is hard to see how the industry gets them back,” Mr. Higgins said. “It’s a classic ‘damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don’t’ scenario for the industry.”
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HEADLINE	01/31 Day 342 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/31/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-342-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The United States will not provide the F-16 fighter jets that Ukraine has sought in its fight against Russia, President Joe Biden said on Monday, as Russian forces claimed a series of incremental gains in the country’s east. • Volodymyr Zelenskiy’s most senior adviser, Andriy Yermak, has suggested Poland is willing to supply Ukraine with the F-16 fighters. Yermak said Ukraine had had “positive signals” from Warsaw in a Telegram posting, although Poland’s prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, was careful to stress his own country would only act in consultation with Nato allies, as Ukraine’s lobbying for the combat jets steps up only a few days after Germany and the US agreed to send over tanks. • Zelenskiy has called for western weapons to be supplied more quickly. Speaking in his nightly address, the Ukrainian president said Russia was hoping to drag out the war, and exhaust his country’s ability to resist the invaders. “So we have to make time our weapon. We must speed up the events, speed up the supply and opening of new necessary weaponry options for Ukraine,” Zelenskiy said. • The Kremlin warned the west’s supplying of further weapons to Ukraine would only lead to “significant escalation” of the conflict. Kyiv “demands more and more weapons” while Nato countries were “more and more becoming directly involved in the conflict”, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said, after Ukraine’s deputy foreign minister, Andriy Melnyk, called on Germany to send his country a submarine. • Russian forces continued attacks on positions across the frontline near the eastern cities of Bakhmut and Donetsk. Moscow’s troops have been pounding Bakhmut in the Donbas for several months, but in recent days the invaders appeared to have opened up a new effort to gain ground around the village of Vuhledar, 30 miles south-west of Donetsk city. • The situation in Bakhmut and Vuhledar was “very tough” with both areas and other parts of the Donetsk region “under constant Russian attacks”, President Zelenskiy said. Vuhledar is close to the junction with the southern Zaporizhzhia front and considered a hinge point for both sides, but remains held by the Ukrainians despite a claim by the leader of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic to the contrary. • Ukraine’s military and Russia’s Wagner private military group are both claiming to have control in the area of Blahodatne, eastern Donetsk region. “Units of Ukraine’s defence forces repelled the attacks of the occupiers in the areas of ... Blahodatne ... in the Donetsk region,” Ukraine’s military reported, adding its forces also repelled attacks in 13 other settlements in the Donetsk region. Wagner, designated by the US as a transnational criminal organisation, said on the Telegram messaging app on Saturday that its units had taken control of Blahodatne. • The Russian government on Monday banned domestic oil exporters and customs bodies from adhering to western-imposed price caps on Russian crude. The measure was issued to help enforce President Vladimir Putin’s decree of 27 December that prohibited the supply of crude oil and oil products from 1 February for five months, to nations that abide by the caps. The new Russian act bans corporates and individuals from including oil price cap mechanisms in their contracts. • Ukraine’s state-run energy operator Ukrenergo has said there is a “significant” deficit in the country’s energy system due to damage caused by Russian missile attacks. Ukraine’s energy system had “survived” 13 rocket attacks and 15 drone strikes from Russian forces, which had “caused significant damage to high-voltage facilities and power plants”, it added. • Ukraine’s military will spend nearly \$550m (£444m / €505m) on drones (UAVs) in 2023, and 16 supply deals have already been signed with Ukrainian manufacturers, defence minister Oleksii Reznikov has said. Ukraine has received significant supplies of UAVs from its partners

	<p>but Kyiv is now seeking to boost domestic production to build what officials cast as an “army of drones”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President Volodymyr Zelenskiy met Denmark’s prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, in the southern Ukrainian region of Mykolaiv on Monday. The pair “reviewed the state of the region’s energy infrastructure, the means of its protection and the pace of recovery”, and discussed the impact of Russian missile and drone strikes, Zelenskiy posted to Telegram. • Nato’s secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, has urged South Korea to increase military support to Ukraine, suggesting it reconsider its policy of not exporting weapons to countries in conflict. Stoltenberg thanked South Korea for its non-lethal aid to Ukraine, but urged it to do more, adding there is an “urgent need” for ammunition. • The UK’s defence minister, Ben Wallace, has said that the tanks donated to Ukraine will arrive on the frontline “this side of the summer”. Britain should be “really proud” of having led the world in supporting Ukraine and standing up to Russian aggression, prime minister Rishi Sunak has said. • The president of Croatia, Zoran Milanović, has criticised western countries for supplying Ukraine with heavy tanks and other weapons. Speaking to reporters in Zagreb, Milanović said he was “against sending any lethal arms” to Kyiv, arguing that supplying Ukraine with weapons only “prolongs the war” and that Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula seized and annexed by Russia in 2014, will “never again be part of Ukraine”. • The new US ambassador to Russia, Lynne Tracy, was heckled by a crowd of people chanting anti-US slogans as she entered the Russian foreign ministry in Moscow to present her diplomatic credentials. Protests in Russia – particularly on issues related to the war – are effectively banned unless they have the backing of the authorities.
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HEADLINE	01/30 Australia, France arms deal for Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jan/30/australia-and-france-agree-arms-deal-for-ukraine-as-talks-seek-to-bury-aucus-debacle
GIST	<p>Australia and France have agreed to a deal to jointly manufacture and supply thousands of artillery shells to the Ukrainian army, the defence and foreign ministers of the two countries announced on Monday.</p> <p>The agreement, “worth several million (Australian) dollars”, was announced after bilateral talks in Paris aimed at resetting the relationship between the two countries seriously damaged by the 2021 Aucus affair.</p> <p>A first shipment of 155mm shells from existing stocks is expected to be delivered to Kyiv within the next two months. The ministers refused to give further details of the contract that will see Australia and France jointly manufacture the ammunition that can be used by French, American and German artillery supplied to Ukraine.</p> <p>Australian deputy prime minister and defence minister, Richard Marles, said the signed agreement was the opening of “new cooperation between the Australian and French defence industries.”.</p> <p>“We wanted to act together as a statement of how importantly Australia and France regard support of Ukraine in the current conflict. We wanted to make it really clear that Australia and France stand together in support of Ukraine in the face of the aggression from Russia,” Marles added.</p> <p>Marles and the foreign affairs minister, Penny Wong, met their counterparts Sébastien Lecornu and Catherine Colonna for what is known as a “2+2” meeting, the first since the 2021 diplomatic rupture sparked by Aucus. France was furious after Canberra dumped a \$90bn deal for French submarines in favour of a deal with the US and UK. Angry French officials, including the French president Emmanuel Macron, accused the government of Scott Morrison of “betrayal”.</p> <p>At a press conference after the talks in Paris on Monday, the key – and repeated – words were “warmth” and “friendship” between the two countries. In an opening salvo, Colonna said the talks were the first of their format since 2021 adding drily: “I will not go back over that.” She said the aim of the meeting was to</p>

	<p>forge a partnership based on “mutual respect, confidence and common values”. Asked if the two countries trying to publicly paper over the cracks in their relationship publicly, she replied: “It’s not communication. It’s politics”.</p> <p>Marles said the aim of the talks was to “grow and deepen the relationship between our two defence forces and said the two countries had agreed to greater access to their respective defence facilities in the Indo-Pacific region.</p> <p>Asked whether delays in the Aukus programme meant Australia would be asking France to supply “interim” submarines, Marles said no.</p> <p>“We are obviously working closely with the US and the UK to develop a nuclear power submarine capability. We will be in a position to make our announcement about that soon...there are no plans for any conventional powered interim submarine capability as we work towards gaining nuclear power capability.”</p> <p>Lecornu said he hoped the countries could start with a “blank page”.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/31 China: Covid wave ‘coming to an end’
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/31/china-claims-covid-wave-is-coming-to-an-end-as-tourism-and-factory-activity-rebound
GIST	<p>China’s wave of Covid is “coming to an end”, health officials have claimed, saying there had been no sign of a new surge from the lunar new year holiday period, despite a big increase in travel compared to last year.</p> <p>Government figures released on Tuesday showed big rises in tourism and hospitality activity compared to the same time last year. Factory activity has also rebounded for the first time in four months, an early sign of economic return after the country reported its slowest growth in about half a century during strict Covid controls.</p> <p>After abruptly lifting zero-Covid restrictions in early December, China was swamped by a wave of Covid cases. Available data on admissions to hospitals and fever clinics released in recent weeks showed an apparent peak in infections around early January.</p> <p>There were concerns that the mass travel of hundreds of millions of people for the lunar new year period could further spread infections.</p> <p>On Tuesday, the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) claimed however, “there has not been an obvious rebound in Covid cases”.</p> <p>“In this time, no new variant has been discovered, and the country’s current wave is coming to an end.”</p> <p>Figures from the ministry of transport showed travel in the first 22 days of this year’s travel period was 75.8% higher than in 2022, although it was still only around half the number of trips made during the last pre-pandemic lunar new year in 2019.</p> <p>Officials had predicted that travel would increase by 99.5% year-on-year over the whole 40 days, and reach 70.3% of pre-pandemic levels, analysis firm Trivium said.</p> <p>Other economic figures were mixed, as China grapples with the lingering effects of zero-Covid on its economy. The most positive results were in the tourism and hospitality sectors, which reached almost 81% of pre-pandemic levels.</p>

	<p>Domestic tourism trips increased to 88.6% of 2019's level, the ministry of culture and tourism said, but revenue from consumption-related industries grew by just 12.2% in the first week of the holiday period.</p> <p>The official manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) stood at 50.1, compared with a reading of 47.0 in December, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said on Tuesday. The 50-point mark separates contraction from growth.</p> <p>The IMF also revised China's growth outlook sharply higher for 2023, to 5.2% from 4.4% in the October forecast after zero-Covid lockdown policies in 2022 slashed the country's growth rate to 3.0%.</p> <p>The lunar new year period – which last about 40 days – has been called the largest at of human migration in the world, with hundreds of millions of people traveling across China and the region, including domestic migrant workers returning to home villages and towns to reunite with family. For many, it is the only chance they can go home each year, but the pandemic had prevented many from doing so in recent years.</p> <p>Even after restrictions were lifted this year, people were urged to reconsider visiting elderly relatives of those relatives had not yet been infected.</p> <p>The true scale of infections and deaths – particularly outside cities – has not been clear. Estimates of deaths range from about 80,000 – the official figure based on cases in hospitals – to more than a million according to global health experts.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 New Boeing assembly line Everett 2024
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/labor-unions-residents-see-economic-impact-with-new-boeing-assembly-line-coming-everett-2024/5CKRW23YRZG6NPSNPMAA645LJM/
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. — Boeing's announcement that a fourth assembly line will be added to their Everett facility to produce more 737 Max aircraft has already gotten a lot of attention.</p> <p>Jon Holden, President of the Machinist Union District 751, sees this as a win-win situation for more than future Boeing workers.</p> <p>"We can own homes. We can save for our families to get a higher education or go into trade school. We can do a lot in our community with these jobs," Holden said.</p> <p>Holden isn't the only one who thinks this. People in Everett and throughout Snohomish County feel a ripple effect of economic growth could come from this.</p> <p>"I am a very business-oriented person, so I believe in giving corporations what they need in order to hire the people that create growth in our world," Cheryl Granger, who lives in Everett, said.</p> <p>"And hopefully, it will help us, to be honest. (The pandemic) really took a big effect on us. Not just us, but everybody in general, like other businesses," a woman by the name of Harpreet said.</p> <p>Holden also sees Boeing investing more in western Washington as a good sign for the future of aviation. "Whether that's a 757 replacement or whether that is a new single aisle down the road, our members are ready to meet those needs," Holden said.</p> <p>"So, I am glad that Everett decided to do what they did in order to work with Boeing and make it a win-win for everybody," Granger said.</p> <p>In a pair of statements shared with KIRO 7, a Boeing spokesperson spoke about the new assembly line, as well as future job growth for the company: On the 737 line:</p>

“Boeing will establish a fourth 737 MAX production line in Everett beginning in the second half of 2024. Demand for the 737 MAX, especially newer models like the 737-8-200 and 737-10, continues to rise, and adding production capacity will allow us to better meet the needs of our customers. The new line will increase 737 MAX production capacity by 25%. Given the proximity to our 737 factory in Renton, Everett is a great fit with the availability of highly skilled workers and factory space.”

— Jim Proulx, Boeing Communications

On employment:

“We grew Boeing’s global workforce by about 15,000 last year to 156,000 employees, driven by significant hiring in engineering and manufacturing. This talent is helping us design, build and support the next generation of aerospace and defense products for our global customers. In 2023, Boeing intends to hire about 10,000 employees with a focus within our business units and in engineering and manufacturing as we look to further stabilize our operations, increase production and invest in innovation.”

— Jim Proulx, Boeing Communications

The precise number of jobs created by adding a fourth assembly line is currently unclear. Proulx says those numbers are still being ironed out.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Firefighters at-risk: fires abandoned homes
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/fires-in-abandoned-homes-pose-unique-risk-to-firefighters-heres-how-puget-sound-fire-squatters-vacant-boarded-up-emergencies#
GIST	<p>KENT, Wash. — In a single day, Puget Sound Fire said squatters caused fires at two abandoned homes in Kent. The structures were next door to one other.</p> <p>The first fire occurred early Sunday morning at an abandoned home in the 26000 block of 116th Avenue Southeast. Less than 24 hours later, a similar fire gutted an abandoned home next door.</p> <p>In the second instance, Puget Sound Fire said the blaze was confined to one room. Firefighters said the structure was vacant and boarded up. They added that nobody was hurt.</p> <p>In the aftermath of these two cases, KOMO News learned that abandoned structure fires are some of the most challenging calls for firefighters.</p> <p>Puget Sound Fire told KOMO News that abandoned structures are often modified and changed internally, leading to sudden confusion for firefighters during emergencies.</p> <p>"Are there any holes in the floor? Especially if there's a basement, that would be a concern. Are there holes in the ceiling that would allow the fire to get into the attic space quicker than it normally would?" said Pat Pawlack with Puget Sound Fire.</p> <p>Pawlack added that firefighters are required to enter an abandoned building, regardless of if there is proof that it is inhabited.</p> <p>"We don't know if there's anybody inside or not, so we have to assume there is someone inside," he said.</p> <p>According to Puget Sound Fire, very little can be done to prevent squatters from entering abandoned buildings, especially during frigid winter weather.</p> <p>"If someone is gonna want to get in, out of the elements, into a place like this, there's chain link fence where they cut through it, or they'll pry the boards off," explained Pawlack. "They're looking for a place to stay warm."</p>

	<p>Given the dangers of these cases, KOMO asked what can be done to keep other abandoned structures from going up in flames.</p> <p>According to a representative with Kent Police, if you suspect an abandoned property house transients, they say you should contact code enforcement.</p> <p>From there, officers will investigate specific properties and could eventually fine property owners.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Lacey hotel transitions to homeless shelter
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/118-unit-hotel-to-become-enhanced-homeless-shelter-for-those-in-thurston-county-washington-lacey-seattle-king-county-homelessness-low-income-housing-institute-partnership-wsdot-regional-housing#
GIST	<p>LACEY, Wash. — What was once known as Days Inn on Quinault Drive NE in Lacey will become an enhanced shelter for those experiencing homelessness in Thurston County after the Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI) purchased the building.</p> <p>"With purchase of the Days Inn in Lacey we have a unique opportunity to quickly house unsheltered homeless people living along I-5 and other state highways," said LIHI Executive Director Sharon Lee. "Too many people are living in dangerous locations in tents along freeways and on and off-ramps."</p> <p>Thanks to funding from Washington's Right-of-Way (ROW) program and a partnership with LIHI, the Washington State Department of Commerce, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Thurston County, and the City of Lacey, the enhanced shelter will be able to serve at least 120 people experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>According to LIHI, shelter will be available to singles, couples, and people with pets. Each room will have a bed, living space, bathroom, microwave and refrigerator. The shelter will also include a community meeting space, a resource center, and offices for operations, security and case management services.</p> <p>"We're excited to see LIHI's acquisition of 8200 Quinault move forward as it will result in a substantial increase in emergency housing capacity in our community and will ultimately lead to the creation of more permanent supportive housing units, which supports the Regional Housing Council's PSH Strategic Framework," said Tom Webster, Office of Housing & Homeless Prevention Program Manager with Thurston County.</p> <p>The shelter will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week with staff onsite at all times. Case managers with LIHI will be available to help clients obtain permanent housing, employment, health care, and other services.</p> <p>Referrals will come from WSDOT, the City of Lacey and local service agencies, LIHI says.</p> <p>At this time, there is no projected opening date for the shelter.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Seattle average gas price up \$.15 to \$4.21
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-washington-gas-prices-increase-average-cost-gas-buddy-fuel-efficiency-national-price-unleaded-diesel-fuel#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The average price of gas in Seattle is up 8.5 cents since last week, bringing the average cost to \$4.21 per gallon, according to GasBuddy's weekly survey of 775 stations in the city.</p> <p>Prices in the Emerald City are 15.4 cents per gallon higher than a month ago, as of Sunday, GasBuddy said.</p>

The price of diesel has increased 5.4 cents nationally in the past week and stands at an average of \$4.65 per gallon. Nationally, the average price of gas rose 9.7 cents per gallon since last week.

The cheapest gas in Seattle was \$3.49 a gallon on Sunday, GasBuddy said, while the most expensive was \$5.39 per gallon.

Seattle driver Linda Peritore said she's noticed the jump in price and is trying new ways to save.

"We always try to stop where we can get a discount on gas, for this larger car it can cost 60 - 75 bucks," Peritore said.

Experts said the rise in price is unusual for this time of year. Typically, prices are lower due to winter weather keeping drivers off the roads.

Neighboring areas and their current gas prices:

- **Tacoma** - \$3.99/g, up 12.3 cents per gallon from last week's \$3.87/g.
- **Washington** - \$4.02/g, up 11.8 cents per gallon from last week's \$3.90/g.
- **Yakima** - \$3.83/g, up 13.9 cents per gallon from last week's \$3.69/g.

"The national average price of gasoline has risen for the fifth straight week as retailers pass along the rise in wholesale gasoline prices due to continued challenges: refinery utilization that still hasn't fully recovered from December's cold weather, and refinery maintenance season that's just around the corner," said Patrick De Haan, the head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy.

"There appears to be little good news on the gas price front, with prices unlikely to turn around any time soon. Because of the surge in prices last spring, many refineries that had planned maintenance deferred maintenance until 2023."

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HEADLINE	01/30 Videos contradict initial Memphis PD report
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/30/us/tyre-nichols-arrest-videos.html
GIST	<p>MEMPHIS — A police report written hours after officers beat Tyre Nichols was starkly at odds with what videos have since revealed, making no mention of the powerful kicks and punches unleashed on Mr. Nichols and instead claiming that he was violent.</p> <p>The police report painted Mr. Nichols, 29, who died three days after the Jan. 7 beating, as an irate suspect who had “started to fight” with Memphis police officers, even reaching for one of their guns. The videos, which were released last week, showed nothing of the sort.</p> <p>Instead, they captured police officers yanking Mr. Nichols from a car, threatening to hurt him and then — after he ran away — catching up with him and inflicting the deadly beating. All the while, it appears from the videos, Mr. Nichols never struck back.</p> <p>On Monday, the fallout from Mr. Nichols’s death continued. The Police Department announced that it had suspended two more officers, in addition to the five who have already been fired and charged with murder in the beating.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the city’s fire chief, Gina Sweat, fired two emergency medical technicians and a lieutenant who had responded to the scene, saying that they all had violated a range of policies.</p> <p>The fire chief said that the E.M.T.s had been responding to a report of a person who had been pepper sprayed and that they had relied on information given to them at the scene, presumably by some of the police officers who had just kicked, punched and used a baton to pummel Mr. Nichols, a FedEx worker and father who had pleaded with the officers to stop.</p>

The official account written by a police officer early the next morning told a much different story in which Mr. Nichols was the assailant.

It was the latest instance nationwide in which video evidence — whether from body camera footage or a bystander’s cellphone — offered a starkly different account of police violence from what officers had reported themselves.

In Minneapolis, for example, the police said in May 2020 that George Floyd had died following a “medical incident,” a description that was soon [challenged by a teenager’s cellphone video](#), leading to international protests and charges against four officers.

In Mr. Nichols’s arrest, the officer wrote that the police stopped Mr. Nichols’s car on Jan. 7 after seeing him drive quickly and into oncoming traffic, and that, once he was stopped, Mr. Nichols had been “refusing a lawful detention” and fought detectives on the scene.

Cerelyn Davis, the Memphis police chief, has said investigators have been unable to determine whether Mr. Nichols was driving recklessly. And the videos show that officers had approached his car with their guns drawn, while threatening and cursing at him, before pulling him out and pushing him to the ground.

Mr. Nichols, sounding distressed, says “You don’t do that, OK?” and then tries to follow officers’ contradictory and rapid fire commands, which included ordering him to get on the ground while he was already lying down. “All right, I’m on the ground,” he says, before responding to another demand: “Yes, sir.”

But the police continued to be aggressive, with one threatening to fire his Taser at Mr. Nichols and another threatening to “break” his hands. Mr. Nichols pleaded with them to stop, and said at one point, “You guys are really doing a lot right now.”

The police report said that, sometime around this period, Mr. Nichols had grabbed for a detective’s gun, something not shown in any of the videos. The officers then deployed pepper spray into Mr. Nichols’s face, after which he ran away, toward his mother’s house.

A photograph of the police report was first posted online over the weekend by Thaddeus Matthews, a talk-show host in Memphis who is known as The Cussing Pastor and who said he received it from a source. The local district attorney, Steven J. Mulroy, who is leading the prosecution of the officers, said on Monday that he had a copy of a police report with the same account.

Both the Shelby County Sheriff’s Office and the Memphis Police Department are listed on the photograph of the report published by Mr. Matthews, which includes only the last name of the officer who wrote it, making it unclear which agency was responsible for its content. Neither would discuss the document.

When officers caught up with Mr. Nichols several minutes after he fled, they tackled him and severely beat him, with one officer delivering a series of blows to Mr. Nichols’s head while two other officers hold his hands behind his back.

The police report does mention that the police had struck Mr. Nichols in the arm with a baton and that they had fired pepper spray and a Taser at Mr. Nichols, but it includes no further details of the beating that the officers carried out, which took place less than 100 yards from his mother’s house.

Despite the fact that Mr. Nichols does not appear to strike back, the report lists Mr. Nichols as the suspect in an aggravated assault and said he had grabbed officers’ belts and one officer’s vest. A Memphis police officer is listed on the report as a victim. That police officer is one of five who have since been charged with second-degree murder in Mr. Nichols’s death.

Only one of the two police officers whose suspensions were announced on Monday has been identified. That officer, Preston Hemphill, had fired his Taser at Mr. Nichols as he ran away, and who also later said, while his body camera was rolling, “I hope they stomp his ass.” He was not seen on video from the second location, where the police carried out the assault on Mr. Nichols.

All five of the charged officers are Black, as was Mr. Nichols. Officer Hemphill is white.

The district attorney’s office said in a statement on Monday that prosecutors were still examining whether to bring more charges, including against Officer Hemphill, the Fire Department employees and officials who wrote reports on the episode.

Chief Sweat said on Monday that the two E.M.T.s who she fired had “failed to conduct an adequate patient assessment” on Mr. Nichols after arriving at the scene. The lieutenant who was fired never got out of the fire engine, the chief said.

A day earlier, The Times had reported that the E.M.T.s had largely looked on as Mr. Nichols writhed in pain and, at one point, had not touched him or provided any care for nearly seven minutes.

Videos from the scene showed that as the medics were arriving, the police officers who had battered Mr. Nichols were laughing about the episode and describing it in detail, with one saying he had hit Mr. Nichols with “haymakers.” It is unclear whether the medics overheard this or how much the officers told them about the injuries they had inflicted.

They were also insisting that Mr. Nichols must be on drugs, something for which no evidence has emerged. And when another officer arrived at the scene, they described events that, if they happened, were not shown on the footage, claiming that Mr. Nichols “swung” at one officer and “literally had his hand” on that officer’s gun.

The police report is not the only official narrative of the beating that has been challenged by the videos.

The Police Department’s first public statement, issued hours after the arrest, described each of the two encounters only as “confrontations” and omitted details of the beating. “Afterward, the suspect complained of having a shortness of breath,” it said, noting that state investigators had been called in.

The messaging changed after Mr. Nichols died, residents protested and his family pressed the authorities for answers. Chief Davis has since [condemned](#) the actions of the [indicted officers](#) as “a failing of basic humanity.”

Those officers — Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Emmitt Martin III, Desmond Mills Jr. and Justin Smith — have each been charged with the same seven felonies, which, in addition to the second-degree murder charge, include kidnapping, official misconduct and aggravated assault.

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HEADLINE	01/30 IMF upgrades outlook: global rebound
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/30/business/economy/imf-world-economic-outlook.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The International Monetary Fund said on Monday that it expected the global economy to slow this year as central banks continued to raise interest rates to tame inflation, but it also suggested that output would be more resilient than previously anticipated and that a global recession would probably be avoided.</p> <p>The I.M.F. upgraded its economic growth projections for 2023 and 2024 in its closely watched World Economic Outlook report, pointing to resilient consumers and the reopening of China’s economy as among the reasons for a more optimistic outlook.</p> <p>The fund warned, however, that the fight against inflation was not over and urged central banks to avoid the temptation to change course.</p>

“The fight against inflation is starting to pay off, but central banks must continue their efforts,” Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, the I.M.F.’s chief economist, said in an essay that accompanied the report.

Global output is projected to slow to 2.9 percent in 2023, from 3.4 percent last year, before rebounding to 3.1 percent in 2024. Inflation is expected to decline to 6.6 percent this year from 8.8 percent in 2022 and then to fall to 4.3 percent next year.

After a succession of downgrades in recent years as the pandemic worsened and Russia’s war in Ukraine intensified, the I.M.F.’s latest forecasts were rosier than those the fund released in October.

Since then, China abruptly reversed its “zero Covid” policy of lockdowns to contain the pandemic and embarked on a rapid reopening. The I.M.F. also said that the energy crisis in Europe had been less severe than initially feared and that the weakening of the U.S. dollar was providing relief to emerging markets.

The I.M.F. predicted previously that a third of the world economy could be in recession this year. However, Mr. Gourinchas said in a news briefing ahead of the release of the report that far fewer countries were now facing recessions in 2023 and that the I.M.F. was not forecasting a global recession.

“We are seeing a much lower risk of recession, either globally, or even if we think about the number of countries that might be in recession,” Mr. Gourinchas said.

Despite the more hopeful outlook, global growth remains weak by historical standards and the war in Ukraine continues to weigh on activity and sow uncertainty. The report also cautions that the global economy still faces considerable risks, warning that “severe health outcomes in China could hold back the recovery, Russia’s war in Ukraine could escalate and tighter global financing costs could worsen debt distress.”

Growth in rich countries is expected to be particularly sluggish this year, with nine out of 10 advanced economies likely to have slower growth than they had in 2022.

The I.M.F. projects growth in the United States to slow to 1.4 percent this year from 2 percent in 2022. It expects the jobless rate to rise from 3.5 percent to 5.2 percent next year, but that it is still possible that a recession can be avoided in the world’s largest economy.

“There is a narrow path that allows the U.S. economy to escape a recession altogether, or if it has a recession, the recession would be relatively shallow,” Mr. Gourinchas said.

The slowdown in Europe will be more pronounced, the I.M.F. said, as the boost from the reopening of its economies fades this year and consumer confidence frays in the face of double-digit inflation. In the euro area, growth is projected to slow to 0.7 percent from 3.5 percent.

China is projected to pick up the slack with output accelerating to 5.2 percent in 2023 from 3 percent in 2022.

Combined, China and India are expected to account for about half of global growth this year. I.M.F. officials said at a press briefing on Monday night that China’s economic trajectory would be a major driver for the world economy, noting that after a period of flux, China appears to have stabilized and is able to fully produce.

However, Mr. Gourinchas noted that there were still signs of weakness in China’s property market and that its growth could moderate in 2024. The report described the sector as a “major source of vulnerability” that could lead to widespread defaults by developers and instability in the Chinese financial sector.

	<p>A surprising contributor to global growth is Russia, suggesting that efforts by Western nations to cripple its economy appear to be faltering. The I.M.F. predicts Russian output to expand 0.3 percent this year and 2.1 percent next year, defying earlier forecasts of a steep contraction in 2023 amid a raft of Western sanctions.</p> <p>A coordinated plan by the United States and Europe to cap the price of Russian oil exports at \$60 a barrel is not expected to substantially curtail the country's energy revenues.</p> <p>"At the current oil price cap level of the Group of 7, Russian crude oil export volumes are not expected to be significantly affected, with Russian trade continuing to be redirected from sanctioning to non-sanctioning countries," the I.M.F. said in the report.</p> <p>Among the I.M.F.'s most pressing concerns is the growing trend toward "fragmentation." The war in Ukraine and the global response have divided nations into blocs and reinforced pockets of geopolitical tension, threatening to hamper economic progress.</p> <p>"Fragmentation could intensify — with more restrictions on cross-border movements of capital, workers and international payments — and could hamper multilateral cooperation on providing global public goods," the I.M.F. said. "The costs of such fragmentation are especially high in the short term, as replacing disrupted cross-border flows takes time."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Public health emergency for Covid to end
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/30/us/politics/biden-covid-public-health-emergency.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Biden administration plans to let the coronavirus public health emergency expire in May, the White House said on Monday, a sign that federal officials believe the pandemic has moved into a new, less dire phase.</p> <p>The move carries both symbolic weight and real-world consequences. Millions of Americans have received free Covid tests, treatments and vaccines during the pandemic, and not all of that will continue to be free once the emergency is over. The White House wants to keep the emergency in place for several more months so hospitals, health care providers and health officials can prepare for a host of changes when it ends, officials said.</p> <p>An average of more than 500 people in the United States are still dying from Covid-19 each day, about twice the number of deaths per day during a bad flu season. But at the three-year mark, the coronavirus is no longer upending everyday life to the extent it once did, partly because much of the population has at least some protection against the virus from vaccinations and prior infections.</p> <p>Still, the White House said on Monday that the nation needed an orderly transition out of the public health emergency. The administration said it also intended to allow a separate declaration of a national emergency to expire on the same day, May 11.</p> <p>"An abrupt end to the emergency declarations would create wide-ranging chaos and uncertainty throughout the health care system — for states, for hospitals and doctors' offices, and, most importantly, for tens of millions of Americans," the White House said in a statement.</p> <p>The announcement came on the eve of a scheduled vote in the House on a bill that would immediately end the public health emergency. The bill, called the Pandemic Is Over Act, is one of several pandemic-related measures that the Republican-controlled chamber is scheduled to consider this week. The White House issued its statement as the administration's response to that bill and another measure that would end the national emergency.</p>

The back and forth signaled what is likely to be a protracted political battle between House Republicans and the White House over its handling of the pandemic. Republican lawmakers hope to put the Biden administration on the defensive, claiming it spent extravagantly in the name of battling the coronavirus.

“Rather than waiting until May 11, the Biden administration should join us now in immediately ending this declaration,” Representative Steve Scalise, Republican of Louisiana and the majority leader, said in a statement. “The days of the Biden administration being able to hide behind Covid to waste billions of taxpayer dollars on their unrelated, radical agenda are over.”

The White House argues that it is only because of federal Covid policies mandating free tests, treatments and vaccines that the pandemic is now under better control. Covid was the third-leading cause of death from 2020 through mid-2022; now it is no longer among the top five killers, federal officials said.

The public health emergency was first declared by the Trump administration in January 2020, and it has been renewed every 90 days since then. The Biden administration had pledged to alert states 60 days before ending it. The emergency was last renewed earlier in January, and many state health officials expected it would be allowed to expire in mid-April.

Ending the emergency will prompt [complex changes](#) in the cost of Covid tests and treatments that Americans are accustomed to getting for free. Any charges they face will vary depending on whether they have private insurance, Medicare coverage, Medicaid coverage or no health insurance. What state they live in could also be a factor.

Still, the consequences may not be quite as dramatic as public health experts once feared. Medicaid enrollment expanded greatly during the pandemic because low-income Americans were kept in the program for as long as the public health emergency was active.

But a congressional spending package enacted in December effectively broke that link, instead setting an April deadline when states will begin losing additional funding for Medicaid coverage. State officials are likely to gradually remove Americans from Medicaid rolls this year beginning then. That transition avoids a more sudden removal of millions of poor Americans from their health coverage.

By reconfiguring that expensive policy, Congress [was able to use the projected savings](#) to pay for expanded Medicaid benefits for children, postpartum mothers and residents of U.S. territories.

The December legislation also extended coverage for telehealth visits for Medicare recipients through 2024. Telemedicine proved a lifeline for many during the pandemic, and that coverage would have ended when the emergency was lifted.

Still, other services might prove more costly to Americans, particularly those with no insurance. People with private health insurance or Medicare coverage have been eligible for eight free coronavirus tests each month. Insurers were required to cover tests, even if they were administered by providers that were not part of their networks. Once the emergency ends, some Americans will end up paying out of pocket for those tests.

And while vaccines will continue to be covered for people with private insurance or Medicare or Medicaid coverage, the end of the emergency will mean that some Americans may have to pay out of pocket for Covid treatments, such as Paxlovid, an antiviral pill. Hospitals will also no longer receive higher Medicare payment rates for treating Covid patients.

Jennifer Kates, a senior vice president at the Kaiser Family Foundation, said the emergency declaration had provided an important reprieve from the American health care system’s typically fractured way of covering the costs of care, giving more people access to services that might otherwise not have been covered by insurance.

	<p>The White House’s decision, she added, could send the wrong message about how relaxed Americans should be about the virus.</p> <p>“To the extent that it might let people let their guard down from one day to the next, that could raise some challenges,” she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Italy is West’s fastest shrinking nation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/30/world/europe/italy-birthrate.html
GIST	<p>PIACENZA, Italy — On one side of a glass wall, three toddlers in a nursery school flattened play dough with plastic rolling pins. On the other, three old women in a nursing home tapped the pane to get their attention.</p> <p>“Let’s say hi to the nonni,” the children’s teacher said before leading them through a door that connected the two rooms.</p> <p>The children stopped to play with the magnifying glass of a delighted 89-year-old woman who had been using it to read obituaries. Then the toddlers, all 2 years old, took an elevator upstairs, where nursing home residents waited to read them picture books in a small library.</p> <p>“It’s an extraordinary thing,” said one of the residents, Giacomo Scaramuzza, 100. “People think we are from two different worlds, but it’s not true. We are in the same world. And maybe I give them something, too. There is an exchange.”</p> <p>Piacenza’s Elderly and Children Together, an experimental project in the country’s most renowned region for childhood education and elder care, seeks to connect the vulnerable at both extremes of life. But it also puts Italy’s two existential challenges under one roof.</p> <p>Italy’s population is aging and shrinking at the fastest rate in the West, forcing the country to adapt to a booming population of elderly that puts it at the forefront of a global demographic trend that experts call the “silver tsunami.” But it faces a demographic double whammy, with a drastically sinking birthrate that is among the lowest in Europe. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has said Italy is “destined to disappear” unless it changes.</p> <p>This month, Ms. Meloni’s government approved a new “Pact for the Third Age,” which she said would lay a foundation for health and social overhauls for Italy’s exploding population of old people. “They represent the heart of society, and a patrimony of values, traditions and precious wisdom,” said Ms. Meloni, adding that the law would prevent marginalization and the “parking” of elderly in institutions.</p> <p>“To care for the old is to care for all of us,” she said.</p> <p>The overhaul essentially adopted, experts say nearly wholesale, a measure approved at the end of the previous administration of Prime Minister Mario Draghi. Critically, it followed Mr. Draghi’s lead in wrapping the legislation into the European Union recovery fund program, which ensures that it will be enacted.</p> <p>“This is the acknowledgment that long-term care is a welfare policy,” said Cristiano Gori, who leads the Pact for a New Welfare on the Dependent, the umbrella organization that advocated the law.</p> <p>The new law, he said, will fix a system that is “a mess,” streamlining and simplifying government health care and social services, and getting local and national government into the growing field of long-term care. At the same time, it seeks to keep aging Italians in their own homes and out of institutions. A key innovation, he said, depends on funding by the Meloni government, but would give Italians a choice between unconditional cash benefits or larger in-kind contributions to be used for public care.</p>

“The main shortcoming is that there is no money,” Mr. Gori said. The hope, he said, is that Ms. Meloni’s government, which sold itself to voters as being “family, family, family,” will make the program a real priority and fund it. But without more young people to join the work force and pay into pension and welfare systems, the whole system is imperiled.

Ms. Meloni, who once ran for mayor while pregnant, is Italy’s first female prime minister, and throughout her career, she has made raising the country’s perennially low birthrate and helping working mothers a priority.

But critics say her “Italians First” opposition to immigration — she has gone so far as to warn against “ethnic replacement” — hurts population growth. And Ms. Meloni’s government, slowed by local bureaucratic snags, has already delayed a program to build new nursery schools financed with 3 billion euros — or about \$3.3 billion — in European Union recovery funds.

If Italy does not get serious about encouraging young families and working women to have children, “it will remain and forever be a country that gets older,” said Alessandro Rosina, a leading Italian demographer and an author of a “Demographic History of Italy.”

The combination of low employment for women, the fleeing of young professionals and families, little immigration, low birthrates and radically increased life expectancy amounted to a demographic disaster, he said.

The reality of the gray new world poses a make-or-break test for Italy, making it a laboratory for many Western countries with aging populations, some experts said.

Some of Italy’s regions hope to delay that demographic time bomb by prolonging the period in which older people can work, be self-sufficient and contribute, and not be a financial drain on society. The center in Piacenza has sought to invigorate them with its precious resource of children. Before Covid sealed the nursing home off, children in the center ate and even cooked with the older residents. Now things are opening up again.

The children use walkers in the corridor as racecars; they turn a lunch cart into a pirate ship; and they play in the gym while the residents do their fitness routines.

“The most significant relationships were born casually, where the child wanted to go upstairs to the old person’s room, hop on their lap and read a book,” said Francesca Cavozi, 41, the project’s coordinator. She said having the two extremes of the life span, both sharing sometimes uncertain gaits and a taste for juice, in a shared space was a “first step” toward making Italy’s seniors feel engaged and useful.

“The old person feels that the adult looks at them with pity,” Ms. Cavozi said, “the child doesn’t do this yet.”

Some, however, expressed skepticism that the children got much out of it.

“After five minutes, they refuse you,” said Luisa Tani, 86, who reads to the children in part, she said, out of nostalgia for her early years as an elementary school teacher.

The center has received interest from academics. College students have written theses on the center’s approach to intergenerational living, which Ms. Cavozi says echoes the traditional Italian home, with the residents as the heads of the family, the staff as the adults and the children as the children.

She said she hoped researchers would study the effects on the elderly, but also in the long term, on the children, to see if they grow to be more sensitive to the old and vulnerable. But for now, she said with some bewilderment, “in Italy, it has not been replicated.”

Even as Italy slowly comes to terms with the coming transformation, the issues it raises are hardly new to it.

When Benito Mussolini came to power in Italy in 1922, the Fascists immediately got to work on increasing birthrates, stemming emigration and increasing Italy's population to 60 million (from 40 million) by 1950.

"If the number diminishes, ladies and gentlemen, you don't make an empire, you become a colony," Mussolini said in a 1927 speech calling growth a "destiny of the race."

To address what it came to call Italy's "problem of problems," the regime introduced paid maternity leave, among other steps. But the obsession with birthrate by a man who threw in his lot with Hitler, demographers say, had the effect of stigmatizing social policy on the problem, leading Italy to invest less in assistance for young families than other European countries after the war.

"The belief that family policies had a Fascist echo had a role," said Mr. Rosina, the demographer.

In the 1950s, Italy's economy boomed, and so did its population, which filled with young workers. But generations of leaders largely failed to help Italians with programs like day care, prompting criticism that the country's conservative culture cared more about mothers staying home to give birth than helping women work and raise children.

In November, Ms. Meloni, who has roots in post-Fascist parties, encouraged couples to have children and businesses to hire women. She later announced a 50 percent increase in the "baby bonus" checks parents receive a year after a birth and a 50 percent increase in assistance for three years to families with more than three children.

"We continue to look at today," Ms. Meloni has said, "not realizing we won't have a tomorrow."

But despite billions of euros earmarked for nursery schools by the European Union, Italy has delayed the start date on 1,857 nurseries and 333 kindergartens, the majority in Italy's poorer south. If Italy fails to start building by the latest deadline, June 2023, it risks losing the money.

Mr. Scaramuzza, the centenarian, said he hoped some of the new nurseries would also share space with nursing homes, as his does.

"Not having had children or grandchildren," he said, "here, I have a great number of grandchildren."

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HEADLINE	01/30 Pandemic used-car boom faces abrupt end
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/30/business/economy/used-cars-carmax-carvana.html
GIST	<p>About a year ago, the used-car business was a rollicking party. The coronavirus pandemic and a global semiconductor shortage forced automakers to stop or slow production of new cars and trucks, pushing consumers to used-car lots. Prices for pre-owned vehicles surged.</p> <p>Now, the used-car business is suffering a brutal hangover. Americans, especially people on tight budgets, are buying fewer cars as interest rates rise and fears of a recession grow. And improved auto production has eased the shortage of new vehicles.</p> <p>As a result, sales and prices of used cars are falling and the auto dealers that specialize in them are hurting.</p> <p>"After a huge run up in 2021, last year was a reality check," Chris Frey, senior manager of economic and industry insights at Cox Automotive, a market research firm. "The used market now faces a challenging year as demand weakens."</p>

According to Cox, used-car values fell 14 percent in 2022 and are expected to fall more than 4 percent this year. That shift means many dealers may have no choice but to sell some vehicles for less than they paid.

The industry's difficulties have been exemplified by Carvana, which sells cars online and became famous for building "vending machine" towers where cars can be picked up. The company recently reported a quarterly loss of more than \$500 million, and has laid off 4,000 employees.

In the last 12 months, Carvana piled up debt. Its stock price has fallen by more than 95 percent in the last 12 months, and three states temporarily suspended its operating license after consumer complaints.

"We think there's a decent chance the company will end up having to file for bankruptcy protection," said Seth Basham, an Wedbush analyst. "They have too much debt for the level of sales and profitability and can't support that debt load, and likely will need to restructure."

In a statement to The New York Times, Carvana said it was confident it had "sufficient" funds to turn its business around, noting the company had \$2 billion in cash and an additional \$2 billion in "other liquidity resources" at the end of the third quarter.

It has also hired the investment bank Moelis & Company and is working to reduce its inventory of vehicles and cut the cost of reconditioning them.

"Millions of satisfied customers have responded positively to Carvana's e-commerce model for buying and selling cars," the company said. "Although the current environment and market has drawn attention to the near term, we continued to gain market share in the third quarter of 2022, and we remain focused on our plan to drive to profitability."

CarMax, another used-car giant, is also hurting, although it is on much steadier ground. In the three months that ended in November, its vehicle sales fell 21 percent to 180,000, and net income tumbled 86 percent, to \$37.6 million.

CarMax is trying to avoid deep price cuts to ensure it makes money on each sale, said the company's chief executive, Bill Nash, even if that means the company's overall sales are falling. "We're trying to strike a nice balance between making sure our cars are priced right but also trying to maintain our margins," he added.

CarMax is being more cautious about acquiring cars and trucks until prices stop declining, Mr. Nash said. In its most recent quarter, the company bought 238,000 cars from individuals and dealers, about 40 percent fewer than in the same period in the previous year.

The buying and selling of used cars is an enormous business. Cox Automotive expects about 36 million used vehicles will be sold in the United States this year. Fewer than half as many new cars and trucks are expected to be sold in 2023.

Many consumers turn to slightly used cars to avoid paying the full price of a new vehicle. For consumers with lower incomes or weak credit ratings, older used cars with a lot of miles on the odometer are often the only option.

The Federal Reserve's campaign to raise interest rates to fight inflation has made it harder and more expensive to buy cars. In December, the average interest rate on used car loans was 12.37 percent, up from less than 10 percent a year before, according to Cox Automotive.

CarMax is still attracting shoppers to its website, Mr. Nash said, but many now end their search when they realize how much they are likely to pay per month. "People click and see their payment and that's where they balk," he said.

The used-car business is made up of thousands of small outlets, many of them family businesses. CarMax is the largest player in the market but only accounts for a sliver of total sales.

Founded in 1993, CarMax tried to try to make the fragmented used-car business more efficient in the same way Blockbuster once sought to do with the video-rental business. CarMax has produced steady profits for more than a decade. It currently has about 240 locations and last year sold more than about 900,000 cars to consumers.

CarMax is well positioned despite the difficult conditions it faces, Mr. Basham said: “I think they’re going to emerge from this downturn as one of the best-positioned companies to take additional market share.”

Carvana is a much younger company. It was founded in 2012 by Ernest Garcia III, the company’s chief executive, and his father, Ernest Garcia II, who is the owner and founder of a separate used-car business called DriveTime. Mr. Garcia III has sought to create the Amazon of used cars, a fully online retailer where shoppers can buy a car on a website or app, and have the vehicle delivered to their door.

To build its brand, Carvana constructed 75-foot tall parking garages that can store about two dozen cars and operate like giant vending machines. Customers can opt to pick up a car at one of the towers.

Last summer, Jerry Speers, an technology professional in Nashville, bought a 2021 Alfa Romeo Stelvio sport-utility vehicle from Carvana for about \$35,000. It was his third purchase from the company.

“I hate spending hours in a dealership, so I liked the idea of doing it all online,” he said. “I researched it at my own pace for a few weeks and then signed the deal. A week or two later a truck pulled up to my house with the car.”

When the pandemic forced car buyers to shop online, Carvana became a Wall Street darling and its stock soared, reaching a high of about \$345 a share in 2021.

But the hoopla obscured some operational troubles. The company has never reported profit for a full year in the nearly decade that its shares have traded on the stock market. It has spent a lot of money to add retail locations, build towers and refine its online platform.

In some markets, it has struggled to grow amid stiff competition. In Denver, Carvana’s vending machine tower has stood empty for months. CarMax has four locations around Denver. Another rival, AutoNation, opened two used-car dealerships in the Denver area in 2021, and supplies them with inventory from cars traded in at its 17 new-car franchises in the area.

“The used business in Colorado has seen some challenges with inventory, so self-sourcing vehicles is a considerable strength for us in this environment,” Marc Cannon, AutoNation’s chief marketing officer, said.

Carvana said it expected to open the Denver location “in the near future.”

The logistics of delivering cars and processing all the paperwork has proved challenging for Carvana. So many consumers complained about long delays getting titles to cars they bought from the company and other issues that North Carolina temporarily suspended Carvana’s business license in 2021. Michigan and Illinois took similar steps in 2022.

The company said it had resolved state complaints with settlements that “allow us to continue selling and buying cars.”

Carvana’s financial difficulties were compounded last May when it bought an auto auction company with the help of \$3.75 billion in new bonds just as interest rates were starting to rise. Carvana’s debt payments have soared, and many investors are worried about the company’s prospects. On Jan. 25, the stock closed at about \$6.50.

	<p>“They closed this acquisition at the worst time,” Mr. Basham said. “They added so much debt, it created an albatross around their neck.”</p> <p>But Carvana pushed back on criticism, saying in its statement that the acquisition gives it the ability to expand and offer customers a wider choice of vehicles and faster delivery times.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Federal workers bilked pandemic loans?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/30/tens-of-thousands-of-federal-employees-bilked-gove/
GIST	<p>Tens of thousands of federal employees stole taxpayers’ money by filing bogus pandemic loan requests.</p> <p>Sen. Joni Ernst wants each of them fired.</p> <p>“I hope this money can be recovered, and, to deter those who might ever think of trying to do this again in the future, those who abused the public trust will have their federal employment terminated,” the Iowa Republican said in a letter to Michael E. Horowitz, the inspector general leading the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee.</p> <p>The employees were flagged by the committee’s Pandemic Analytics Center of Excellence, a data-driven attempt to sniff out fraud in the trillions of dollars of pandemic assistance that the federal government has paid out over the past three years.</p> <p>PACE built a database of all pandemic loan applications filed with the Small Business Administration, matched it to lists of federal employees and came up with leads to investigate. It then worked with inspector general offices in various federal agencies to follow up.</p> <p>“So far, this analysis has helped six agency OIGs match tens of thousands of employees with SBA loans for which they were not eligible,” PACE’s overseers at the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee said last month in a report to Congress.</p> <p>Ms. Ernst tapped the double-dipping federal employees for her “Squeal award,” which she bestows on wasteful government spending. The award is derived from a campaign commercial in which Ms. Ernst, who grew up on an Iowa farm where she castrated pigs, vowed to take her skills to Washington and make the big spenders “squeal.”</p> <p>The loans the employees took were from the Paycheck Protection Program and the Economic Injury Disaster Loan program, both aimed at bolstering small businesses so they didn’t shutter during the early economic troubles.</p> <p>Ms. Ernst said investigators should also look at federal employees’ use of pandemic unemployment benefits.</p> <p>She pointed to a report by the Homeland Security Department’s inspector general that found hundreds of department employees claimed unemployment even though they were still collecting their government salaries.</p> <p>Some 900 claims were deemed clearly ineligible, and another 900 were suspect.</p> <p>Even worse, the department paid the money itself. One of the stages of unemployment was run by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The audit said \$2.6 million was paid out to potentially fraudulent claims from department employees.</p> <p>Nearly three dozen employees filed unemployment claims from Homeland Security computer systems, suggesting they were on the job at the exact time they were claiming unemployment.</p>

In 366 cases, pay records showed that employees received unemployment benefits even though they were putting in overtime or extra shifts. One employee averaged 147 hours of work per two-week pay period while the department was paying unemployment.

“It is appalling for anyone fortunate enough to have the reliability of a government paycheck to take advantage of financial assistance intended to provide a lifeline to Americans who lost their jobs or were unable to work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic,” the senator wrote to the inspector general consortium. “These misbehaved bureaucrats have also tarnished the reputation of the other dedicated civil servants, many of whom worked long hours in essential jobs during the pandemic.”

Among cases that have emerged so far is a series of IRS employees who stand accused of claiming bogus small-business loans.

In New Hampshire, a full-time employee at the tax agency claimed he worked at a hair and nail salon and collected \$62,300 in pandemic loan payments. Charles Clark pleaded guilty. He died before he could be sentenced.

Five IRS employees near Memphis, Tennessee, stand accused of collecting more than \$1 million in bogus loans.

Georgia’s inspector general reported earlier this month that more than 280 full-time employees in the state government wrongly claimed unemployment benefits in 2020 or 2021. They were paid more than \$6.7 million, or an average of \$23,700 apiece.

Most appalling are the cases in which employees who worked in their state workforce agencies — the bureaucrats responsible for paying unemployment — were applying for, and approving, their own bogus claims or those of relatives or friends.

Tiffany Pacheco had just emerged from prison after serving time for aggravated identity theft and passing bad checks when Massachusetts hired her to work in its unemployment agency processing benefit claims.

She went on to steal identities from some of the claimants and filed bogus claims in their names, as well as false claims in her own name and that of her husband. All told, she walked away with nearly \$200,000 in bogus payments, prosecutors said.

Pacheco was slapped with a 42-month prison sentence.

In Missouri, Vicky Hefner stands charged with stealing \$140,000 in unemployment that authorities say she siphoned to friends and relatives through her position at the state’s employment agency. Those friends and family paid her kickbacks, authorities said.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Airport in the shadow of Mount Rainier?
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article271665402.html
GIST	<p>Sherwin Ferguson likes national parks.</p> <p>The 63-year-old saw a herd of 300 bison on a recent trip to Yellowstone and a moose on a river bank at Grand Teton.</p> <p>And Ferguson’s property outside Eatonville, Mountain Lodge Farm, looks at Mount Rainier. They have goats and sheep, and they name the cheeses they sell at their dairy after places in the national park.</p> <p>The clean air, trees, animals, and the peace and quiet are part of the draw, she said.</p>

Ferguson is worried how plans for a new major airport in Western Washington could impact that.

“Certainly jet fuel and sound and pollution and all of that is absolutely going to affect a national park,” she said.

As Seattle-Tacoma International Airport approaches capacity, the state is looking at sites for a new airport in Western Washington to handle the growing population. Two of the three greenfield sites on the short list are close to the park.

A spokesperson for Mount Rainier National Park declined The News Tribune’s request for an interview with someone from the park about what impact a new commercial airport in the shadow of Mount Rainier might have on the park and its visitors in the decades to come.

But a letter Mount Rainier National Park superintendent Greg Dudgeon sent to the commission charged with recommending a location for the new airport outlined concerns the National Park Service has with the plan.

“Increased aviation near the park may adversely impact wilderness values, viewsheds, scenic values, air quality, park soundscapes and the opportunity for visitors to experience natural sounds and solitude in an unimpaired condition,” Dudgeon wrote. “Noise and air pollution may occur at considerable distances from an airport, impacting park values and resources. Airport lighting and other aspects of airport operations may be visible at park viewpoints, impacting viewsheds and night sky resources.”

He sent the letter, dated Dec. 15, to the chair of the state Commercial Aviation Coordinating Commission, Warren Hendrickson.

Asked if the commission has had discussions with park leaders, Hendrickson mentioned the letter and shared a copy with The News Tribune.

The News Tribune also has pending records requests for any communication between the commission, its staff and the park.

“Airport development, related public infrastructure, and traffic may impact park visitation and travel patterns from the highly populated Seattle-Tacoma-Olympia corridor via SR-7 or SR-161,” the superintendent’s letter said. “We are also concerned about impacts to wildlife, threatened and endangered species and their habitats, water resources, and wilderness values in our connected watersheds and landscapes.”

The commission has narrowed potential greenfield sites down to three: one south of Graham, one east of Roy, and another near Olympia. The commission is supposed to make a final recommendation to the Legislature by mid-June. State lawmakers will make a final decision, though some have said in recent weeks that they might ask the commission to restart the search process.

Dudgeon’s letter noted that the park is 17 miles and 23 miles from the proposed Pierce County sites, and 40 miles from the one in Thurston County.

“It is unclear whether these issues have been considered before determining the sites to evaluate further for airport development,” Dudgeon wrote. “We request that you conduct robust environmental reviews that include evaluating and mitigating the specific concerns outlined here, and that the National Park Service be included as a stakeholder during these reviews.”

‘THEY’RE GOING TO GO SOMEWHERE ELSE’

Ferguson worries that the development necessary for a new airport would turn the area into another SeaTac.

“It’s going to become ugly urban sprawl,” she said. “They are basically thinking of desecrating the highway, this scenic highway to Mount Rainier. That is essentially where they’re looking.”

It’s not clear what a new airport would mean for traffic to the park.

“Just because they build an airport closer to the park doesn’t mean the park would be able to accommodate what might come its way,” she said.

Jeremy Foust, 45, has had a goat farm for 13 years, Left Foot Farm, that offers Airbnb rentals near Eatonville.

Visitors stay, enjoy the goats and play in the national park.

He said he thinks people visit the area to get away from an urban setting.

With planes overhead and the freeway noise he expects would come with an airport, he said: “Who the heck wants to experience that? They’re going to go somewhere else.”

It’s already tough to run a business in the gateway communities near the Nisqually entrance to the park, he said, in places such as Elbe, Ashford and Eatonville.

“It’s very difficult,” he said. “Just historically there hasn’t been a lot of year-round business.”

Asked if he thinks having an airport closer to the park would mean more visitors, he said he’s not convinced. SeaTac isn’t that far from the park, he argued, and he said he could see the infrastructure that comes with an airport making the drive to the park more difficult.

“I don’t think building in a green space near the national park is the best way forward,” he said. “The park would have to reevaluate its budget and its thought process for how they’re going to deal with visitors, lack of or more so, either one, if an airport is nearby, this close.”

He said he expects those conversations are happening.

The park and the federal government move at “a very slow pace,” he said, but “the park plans for everything.”

Foust acknowledged that the commission has a tough job to do in finding a site for a major airport.

“We have to plan ahead, I get that,” he said. “I don’t know what the solution is.”

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HEADLINE	01/30 Seattle council faces massive turnover
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-politics-seem-to-deter-council-members-from-seeking-reelection/
GIST	<p>Seattle’s City Council is due to experience a massive turnover.</p> <p>This election cycle, more council incumbents will voluntarily give up their positions than will seek reelection as council careers continue to trend shorter.</p> <p>A largely new council will then inherit Seattle’s perennial issues of building more affordable housing and addressing growing public safety concerns, among others. The very same issues that have made council members targets of harassment are contributing to the body’s high turnover, according to interviews with present and former council members.</p>

The council's exodus includes Kshama Sawant, its senior member, who announced two weeks ago that she will vacate her seat after a decade. She followed announcements by District 1 Councilmember Lisa Herbold and District 4 Councilmember Alex Pedersen, and a series of informal statements by Council President Debora Juarez, who represents District 5.

Though Juarez has not yet made an announcement about seeking a new term, she said Friday that harassment and "credible threats" have increased in her time on council and have contributed to her decision.

"I'm not seen as a person by some people and it's not safe for me or my family," Juarez said in an interview.

"No job is worth that," she later added.

Council turnover

While recently retired council members describe the decision to step down as "complex" and "deeply personal," the political climate in Seattle appears to be a primary reason some local leaders are seeking shorter careers on the dais.

"It became less fun and more strenuous," said former Councilmember Nick Licata, who served from 1998-2016.

Of the nine total council seats, there are seven district seats up for election in November, as current terms expire on Dec. 31. The two citywide council positions, along with the mayoral seat, are up for election in 2025.

So far only one — first-term District 7 Councilmember Andrew Lewis — has said he'll run again.

In their official statements, Sawant said she's leaving the council to pursue a new national labor campaign, Herbold said she is making way for a new progressive to run, and Pedersen — who will have served just one term — says he's leaving to spend more time with family.

But the days of "elder statesmen," such as Licata, who served term after term on the council, may be over, as the city's most daunting issues and heightened national attention add pressure to the job, according to former Councilmember Mike O'Brien.

"It felt like a place where you could show up, not piss anyone off, and you were here forever," O'Brien, a self-described "bleeding heart" ideologue who served on the council from 2009-2019, said of the generations of council members who preceded him.

"But it seemed like when I came on some of us were like, 'We're really going to start doing [expletive],' " O'Brien said of a "radical" shift in policy on the council.

As members led on some progressive local policies — like an environmental ban on Yellow Pages in 2010, a \$15-per-hour minimum wage in 2014 and a controversial tax on Amazon in 2018 that was later repealed — the council garnered attention from outside of the city, including coverage from national media, some of which credited the city for leading the way on local policy, while others used Seattle as a cautionary tale.

"I think that council members are more aware of Seattle being in some ways a national target, since it's held up as being this uber-liberal city," Licata said.

"Having a national prominence has affected how people worry about being perceived," Licata added.

The city has had to assume a greater role in human services, Licata said, adding to the burden of elected officials, as economic disparities have worsened in the last decade.

“It’s not because liberals took over,” Licata said, “it’s because the problems became bigger and we had less money to solve them.”

Intractable problems

Homelessness, O’Brien said, was the biggest and most difficult issue faced by the council in his time. As the visible and tangible impacts of the housing crisis outpaced any progress the city made, he said, frustrations and concerns mounted among constituents.

“If we built 600 affordable housing units in a year, doubling what we built the last year, people would still ask, ‘Well, then how are there now 2,000 homeless people when there used to be 1,500,’” O’Brien said. “We could not keep up.”

Homelessness spurred even his previously apolitical friends to start asking questions about how the city would solve the burgeoning housing crisis. Soon O’Brien says it was hard to show up at his kids’ birthday parties, because people wanted answers he didn’t have.

“I could never say, ‘Once we do this, it will be fixed,’ and that was hard to explain to people, because it wasn’t just one thing we could do to fix this,” he said.

Increased local economic issues and national attention drove a wedge between residents who grew frustrated with the council, begetting screaming matches in public meetings, and more serious examples of doxing and harassment.

While O’Brien describes himself as “a white dude with a bunch of privilege who hasn’t been yelled at much in [his] life,” he fears that vitriol and harassment toward other elected officials may discourage qualified people from running or staying in office.

“Can we recruit good quality people to run for office? Do they want it?” he asked. “I’m worried that it’s going to backslide.”

Juarez, the council’s first Indigenous president, agrees, noting that harassment is disproportionate for women and people of color on the council.

For example, back in 2016, the council voted 5-4 to block a developer from building a Sodo sports arena in an attempt to lure the NBA back to the city. The vote was split by gender, with all five female members — including Juarez, Sawant and Herbold — voting against it.

The women faced such backlash in person and online that it attracted national media coverage. On her now-defunct late-night comedy show, “Full Frontal,” comedian Samantha Bee deemed them the “Seattle Seawards.”

“And it was only because we were women and it never stopped,” Juarez said Friday, reflecting on her seven years on the council.

“It was always bad for women of color on the council and then all hell broke loose with 2020 and even before that with Trumpism,” Juarez added, noting that she and her family are addressing the most serious threats in court.

Harassment of local elected officials peaked during protests against police violence in summer 2020, and around a commitment to defund the Seattle Police Department by 50%, which was quickly reversed. Activists went to the homes of several City Council members, including Pedersen and Juarez, who reported intimidating behavior such as written messages left at their homes. Later that year, someone threw a rock through Herbold’s window after she suggested there be legal protections for people caught shoplifting essential items.

Last year, the council passed a resolution condemning the harassment of elected officials and candidates after the Rev. Cary Anderson of Seattle's First AME Church was reportedly shot with a BB gun while campaigning for a seat in Washington's 30th legislative district.

Since then, Sawant says bags of human feces have been thrown on the lawn of her private residence six times, though she noted when announcing that she would not seek a fourth term that the harassment did not cause her decision. No stranger to conflict, Sawant said in an interview last week that the tension around her politics is a "badge of honor."

"If the ruling class and their spokespeople were not angry with me, I would worry about what I was doing wrong," Sawant said after announcing her intentions to leave office.

Pedersen declined to comment for this story.

While Herbold said last week she agrees that "polarization in local politics has increased as Seattle has taken the national stage as a progressive leader," she maintains that it was not the primary factor in her decision and that the trend started years before she was in office.

Who's next?

This election, the council will lose its only socialist member in Sawant — who has pushed ideas like rent control, defunding the police and taxing large businesses — and its most centrist member — Pedersen, who has opposed the same ideas, while backing policies that support businesses and the Seattle Police Department. In Juarez and Herbold, the council will lose a moderate and a progressive, both two-term members who veered away from extremes on the council.

While it's uncertain who will fill the vacated seats, voters in 2021 chose former Councilmember Bruce Harrell, a moderate, as mayor, and pro-business, moderate Democrat Sara Nelson as a citywide council member, while electing Republican Ann Davison as city attorney. The victories suggested a potential shift on the council toward the center.

Still, Seattle writer and 2019 council candidate Shaun Scott predicts progressive activists will step up to fill the void left by Sawant, and other left-leaning public servants.

"In every generation in Seattle politics, there's been an active and very vibrant left movement," Scott said. "There are going to continue to be voices calling attention to the inequities that the social order we live under has produced."

He added, "We tend to focus on the individual personalities, but I look at the structural side. We don't have a fair city. We have a city with huge wealth inequalities and huge overreaches of police power."

Licata also warned that consistent high turnover will necessitate more training if new council members want to be able to pass effective policies.

"Otherwise, power will drift toward department heads, and council members will become less powerful as they know less about how the city works," Licata said.

O'Brien issued a similar warning, noting that the ideal council has some members with experience and other who are newer, more zealous.

"If [the council] turns into a school board where everyone serves four years, no one's going to know enough to get things done," O'Brien said.

Candidates have until May 19 to get on the ballot. So far 14 [candidates have filed](#) paperwork to run for one of the seats.

HEADLINE	01/30 Croatia president criticizes tank deliveries
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/politics-croatia-government-ukraine-zoran-milanovic-europe-3fbc3daf4bf87c4979ddedc4c00fad98
GIST	<p>ZAGREB, Croatia (AP) — NATO-member Croatia’s president on Monday criticized Western nations for supplying Ukraine with heavy tanks and other weapons in its campaign against invading Russian forces, saying those arms deliveries will only prolong the war.</p> <p>Zoran Milanovic told reporters in the Croatian capital that it’s “mad” to believe that Russia can be defeated in a conventional war.</p> <p>“I am against sending any lethal arms there,” Milanovic said. “It prolongs the war.”</p> <p>“What is the goal? Disintegration of Russia, change of the government? There is also talk of tearing Russia apart. This is mad,” he added.</p> <p>Milanovic won the presidential election in Croatia in 2019 as a left-leaning liberal candidate, a counterpoint to the conservative government currently in power in the European Union and NATO-member state. But he has since made a turn to populist nationalism and criticized Western policies toward Russia as well as the Balkans.</p> <p>Milanovic has built a reputation of being pro-Russian, which he has repeatedly denied. Yet in recent months, he has openly opposed the admission of Finland and Sweden into NATO as well as the training of Ukrainian troops in Croatia as part of EU aid to the embattled country.</p> <p>After months of hesitation, the U.S. said it will send 31 of its 70-ton Abrams battle tanks to Ukraine, and Germany announced it will dispatch 14 Leopard 2 tanks and allow other countries to do the same.</p> <p>Milanovic said that “from 2014 to 2022, we are watching how someone provokes Russia with the intention of starting this war.”</p> <p>“What is the goal of this war? A war against a nuclear power that is at war in another country? Is there a conventional way to defeat such a country?” Milanovic asked on Monday. “Who pays the price? Europe. America pays the least,” he said.</p> <p>“A year has passed and we are only now talking about tanks,” Milanovic said. “Not a single American tank will go to Ukraine in a year. Only German tanks will be sent there.”</p> <p>Although the presidential post is mostly ceremonial in Croatia, Milanovic is formally the supreme commander of the armed forces. His latest anti-Western outbursts have embarrassed and irritated the country’s government which has fully supported Ukraine in its fight against Russia’s aggression.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 PSE rethinks program to shift natural gas
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/puget-sound-energy-rethinks-pilot-program-to-move-people-off-natural-gas/
GIST	<p>After drawing criticism from environmental and clean power advocates, Puget Sound Energy is rethinking the structure of a \$15 million pilot program that could help boost the use of heat pumps and other electric appliances.</p> <p>The pilot program targets some 10,000 customers, and would include a mix of financial incentives, home energy evaluations and education under a settlement agreement reached last year as PSE sought approval of rate increases. PSE is supposed to engage those customers through “at least two” of these measures, according to the settlement.</p>

PSE, the state's largest energy utility, serves some 1.2 million electric customers and 850,000 customers with natural gas.

The utility's initial proposal for the pilot was outlined in a meeting earlier this month with representatives of the Sierra Club, Front and Centered and the NW Energy Coalition, three groups that negotiated the settlement with PSE.

It called for about 200 low-income customers with heavy energy burdens to receive substantial financial assistance to install heat pumps and possibly other electrical appliances. Those customers, and another 800, would receive extensive evaluations of what it would take to electrify their homes.

Other customers targeted in the pilot program would receive education about electrification and opportunities for incentives from state, federal or other sources, according to the initial plans disclosed in the meeting.

That plan got pushback from representatives of the three groups who expected more people to be able to receive either financial incentives or energy assessments of their homes.

In a joint statement, they said PSE's plans failed to meet the terms of the settlement. "We expect PSE to implement the settlement in a way that makes a meaningful start toward electrifying buildings in its service territory, and so far it isn't doing that."

PSE communication manager Melanie Coon, in a written statement this week, said "the numbers previously provided were preliminary and we are updating them as we get feedback from stakeholders and refine the scope of the pilot ... At this point, it's premature to say exactly how many customers will be included in each component of the project."

In the next two decades, PSE will have to make a major shift away from natural gas in heating and generating electricity, under state laws that seek to cut greenhouse gas emissions fueling climate change.

Coon said that under the settlement, some of the \$15 million needs to pay for a study on decarbonizing PSE systems and development of a broader strategy for heat pumps and other electrification.

But most of the money will be spent on the pilot.

"We are excited about the pilot because it will provide real-time, real-life information about what it takes to convert customers, and understand the barriers they face accessing heat pump technology," Coon said.

She said the focus would be on customers who typically couldn't afford to install the systems.

In Olympia, lawmakers are considering legislation to invest state funds to provide financial assistance for low- and moderate-income households and small businesses to install high-efficiency heat pumps. House Bill 1147 would provided \$80 million in revenue for this effort. The money would be raised by the Climate Commitment Act, which requires some major greenhouse gas emitters to purchase allowances to cover this pollution.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Students lost 1/3 rd school year to pandemic
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/30/health/covid-education-children.html
GIST	<p>Children experienced learning deficits during the Covid pandemic that amounted to about one-third of a school year's worth of knowledge and skills, according to a new global analysis, and had not recovered from those losses more than two years later.</p> <p>Learning delays and regressions were most severe in developing countries and among students from low-income backgrounds, researchers said, worsening existing disparities and threatening to follow children into higher education and the work force.</p>

The analysis, published Monday in the journal [Nature Human Behavior](#) and drawing on data from 15 countries, provided the most comprehensive account to date of the academic hardships wrought by the pandemic. The findings suggest that the challenges of remote learning — coupled with other stressors that plagued children and families throughout the pandemic — were not rectified when school doors reopened.

“In order to recover what was lost, we have to be doing more than just getting back to normal,” said [Bastian Betthäuser](#), a researcher at the Center for Research on Social Inequalities at Sciences Po in Paris, who was a co-author on the review. He urged officials worldwide to provide intensive summer programs and tutoring initiatives that target poorer students who fell furthest behind.

[Thomas Kane](#), the faculty director of the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard, who has studied school interruptions in the United States, reviewed the global analysis. Without immediate and aggressive intervention, he said, “learning loss will be the longest-lasting and most inequitable legacy of the pandemic.”

Before Covid, crises such as the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir, the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa and enduring teacher strikes in Argentina showed that long-term school absenteeism could have lasting effects. But none had compared to Covid’s scope: About [1.6 billion children worldwide](#) missed a significant amount of classroom time during the pandemic’s peak, according to Unicef.

To quantify the impact, investigators combined findings from 42 different studies published between March 2020 and August 2022, spanning middle- and high-income countries in the Americas, Europe and southern Africa. Global education deficits were equivalent to about 35 percent of a school year and remained “incredibly stable” in the years that followed, Mr. Betthäuser said, as students stopped losing additional ground but also failed to rebound.

Delays were worse in mathematics than in reading, Mr. Betthäuser said, possibly because math requires more formal instruction and because reading comprehension generally improves with brain development as children grow. Data shows that students of lower socioeconomic status shouldered much of the burden, likely because they faced noisy study spaces, spotty internet connections and economic turbulence.

Dr. Damon Korb, a developmental and behavioral pediatrician who founded the Center for Developing Minds, was unsurprised to discover that learning deficits were consistent across grade levels. He said that many young children whom he treated struggled to reintegrate to classrooms quickly because they needed to relearn basic socialization skills. And teenagers returned to schools bearing anxiety disorders “beyond anything I’ve ever seen in my career,” he said.

Dr. Korb said he hoped to see more granular research quantifying the delays among unique learners, such as students with attention disorders or autism, who were stuck behind computer screens and unable to access aides.

Deficits were more pronounced in middle-income countries like Brazil, Mexico and South Africa than in high-income ones such as Australia. Sweden, which mostly avoided school closures, showed no major deficits in academic performance, and Denmark also fared well. (Denmark closed schools, but Mr. Betthäuser said the country’s robust welfare structure might have buffered it against stressors at play elsewhere.)

Researchers excluded low-income countries from the analysis, saying they lacked sufficient data. Mr. Betthäuser said he suspected that losses could be even worse in those settings, and called for further research.

In the United States, one study showed that the average public elementary or middle school student lost [the equivalent of a half-year](#) of learning in math, and 6 percent of students were in districts that lost more than a full year. Standardized [math test scores in 2022](#), when compared with those in 2019, showed the [largest drop ever recorded](#) in the three decades since the exam was first administered.

The findings challenge the perceptions of many parents, almost half of whom said [in 2022 surveys](#) that they did not believe their children had suffered any achievement loss during the pandemic, and only 9 percent of whom expressed concern about whether their children would catch up.

A separate [review of test scores from 2.1 million students](#) in the United States highlighted the impacts of economic disparity. Students at schools in communities with high poverty levels spent more of the 2020-2021 school year learning remotely than those at schools in wealthier communities did, and students in poorer schools experienced steeper declines in performance when they were remote.

But “assigning these deficits entirely to school closures would mean missing many mechanisms at play here,” said Sean Reardon, a professor of poverty and inequality in education at Stanford University. Disadvantaged students faced myriad distractions, as parents lost their jobs and others doing essential work became infected at outsize rates.

The analysts also found that, even within districts that were remote for most of the 2020-2021 year, poorer schools lost twice as much learning progress as wealthier schools in the very same districts.

“A kid’s ability to learn and a teacher’s ability to teach are shaped by so many factors beyond just whether they’re physically in the building,” Mr. Reardon said. “If everyone had fallen behind equally, all at once, it presumably wouldn’t affect your chance of getting into college. But when the effect is differential, that could exacerbate inequality into adulthood for the whole generation. That’s worrisome on a global level.”

Because children have a finite capacity to absorb new material, Mr. Betthäuser said, teachers cannot simply move faster or extend school hours, and traditional interventions like private tutoring rarely target the most disadvantaged groups. Without creative solutions, he said, the labor market ought to “brace for serious downstream effects.”

Children who were in school during the pandemic could lose about \$70,000 in earnings over their lifetimes if the deficits aren’t recovered, according to Eric Hanushek, an economist at the Hoover Institution at Stanford. In some states, pandemic-era students could ultimately earn almost 10 percent less than those who were educated just before the pandemic.

The societal losses, he said, could amount to \$28 trillion over the rest of the century.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Cold reality: energy rates rise as temps fall
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/money/consumer/energy-rates-rise-winter-cold-temperatures/281-15a032e4-3d47-45f3-a7ee-0aabd6319585
GIST	<p>OAK HARBOR, Wash. — For Washington residents on low or fixed incomes, cold winter temps and rising energy costs force some to make hard choices.</p> <p>John Owen sets his thermostat to 68 degrees -- not a degree more -- because that's what he can afford.</p> <p>"If I turn it up anymore I'm not gonna be able to afford to pay the bill," he said.</p> <p>Owen and his wife live on a fixed income of just \$1,000 a month.</p> <p>When they go to bed they turn the heat off and bundle up with jackets and blankets to save money.</p> <p>"When it gets cold out, it gets cold in here, and the temperature changes rapidly," Owen said.</p> <p>Owen said his heat bill nearly doubled this month to \$140. He said he's never seen it so high and has had to make decisions he shouldn't have to.</p>

"I have to make a choice," he said. "I have to decide if I going to eat, or am I going to pay my rent and my utilities."

Energy rates up this year

Puget Sound Energy rates jumped by nearly 9% this year while natural gas costs skyrocketed by around 23%.

An early and exceptionally cold winter is giving people sticker shock when they go to pay their bills.

The war in Ukraine along with less natural gas production and increased demand is driving prices higher.

"If they keep raising the prices, how are we gonna afford this?" John asked. "I don't know where it's gonna end."

Utility assistance programs

This winter is creating a "perfect storm" of sorts for agencies like the Opportunity Council, which helps people struggling with rent and utility bills.

COVID relief money to help people pay their bills is running out with the need for assistance higher than ever.

"We do our best to just get really creative, but it is hard on your heart and it is concerning when you know people are really struggling," said the council's Melissa Frasch-Brown.

Community Action of Skagit County provides assistance, as well.

For now, John Owen said he is keeping warm with a pot of beans, hoping for an early spring and brighter days ahead.

"We're just grateful for what we have," he said.

Washington state has among the lowest energy prices in America. Hawaii has the highest.

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HEADLINE	01/30 British Columbia decriminalizes hard drugs
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/canada-experiments-with-decriminalising-hard-drugs/ar-AA16VfU4
GIST	<p>From Tuesday, adults can possess up to 2.5g of such drugs, as well as methamphetamine, fentanyl and morphine.</p> <p>Canada's federal government granted the request by the west coast province to try out the three-year experiment.</p> <p>It follows a similar policy in the nearby US state of Oregon, which decriminalised hard drugs in 2020.</p> <p>Ahead of the pilot's launch, British Columbia and federal officials outlined the rules under the federally approved exemption from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.</p> <p>While those substances will remain illegal, adults found in possession of a combined total of less than 2.5g of the drugs will not be arrested, charged or have their substances seized. Instead, they will be offered information on available health and social services.</p> <p>Federal minister of mental health and addictions Carolyn Bennett on Monday called the move "a monumental shift in drug policy that favours fostering trusting and supportive relationships in health and social services over further criminalisation".</p>

Return to Top	<p>Some 10,000 residents have died from drug overdoses since British Columbia declared drugs to be a public health emergency in 2016, officials said.</p> <p>"Decriminalising people who use drugs breaks down the fear and shame associated with substance use and ensures they feel safer reaching out for life-saving supports," said Jennifer Whiteside, the British Columbia minister for mental health and addictions.</p> <p>Thousands of police officers in the province have been offered training on the rule change, including those in Vancouver, the largest city in the province.</p> <p>The programme will run from 31 January 2023 until 31 January 2026, unless it is revoked by the federal government.</p> <p>Some experts have questioned the 2.5g limit, saying that it is not enough to account for the habits of many addicts.</p> <p>There are some exemptions to the scheme.</p> <p>The sale of drugs remains illegal. It is also illegal to possess drugs on the grounds of schools, childcare facilities and airports.</p> <p>Canada legalised the use of recreational cannabis for adults nationwide in 2018.</p> <p>But the four drugs now allowed in small quantities remain prohibited, meaning there are no plans to sell them in stores, unlike marijuana. Trafficking them across borders also remains illegal.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Intel report: Russia hunts for more troops
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/intelligence-report-reveals-vladimir-putin-is-scrambling-for-more-troops-in-ukraine?ref=home
GIST	<p>Russia is scrounging around for new ways to boost its military's numbers in Ukraine without kicking off domestic backlash, according to a new British government intelligence assessment.</p> <p>"The Russian leadership highly likely continues to search for ways to meet the high number of personnel required to resource any future major offensive in Ukraine, while minimizing domestic dissent," the intelligence analysis, shared on Monday, said.</p> <p>"Russian authorities are likely keeping open the option of another round of call-ups under the 'partial mobilization,'" the assessment added.</p> <p>U.S. officials have begun warning that Russia is likely preparing for a new offensive in the new year. Although Russia has maintained a manpower advantage over Ukraine in the war, the intelligence analysis reveals the balancing act the Kremlin is working on behind the scenes.</p> <p>Russia initiated a "partial mobilization" of 300,000 last fall in an attempt to gin up the war effort in Ukraine, after months of Russian President Vladimir Putin's war plans failing to achieve their major goals. But the domestic response was less than supportive: Hundreds of thousands of Russians fled the country to evade the orders. Those that didn't escape received no training before being sent to the front in some cases.</p> <p>Other signs are trickling out from Russia that the Kremlin is growing desperate for more manpower.</p> <p>Aleksandr Bastrykin, the head of Russia's Investigative Committee, noted in recent remarks that naturalized citizens must participate in the war. And Russia has begun preventing some workers from</p>

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan who hold dual passports from leaving Russia, since they might be needed to fight in Ukraine, according to [RFE/RL](#).

““You are included in a mobilization list, this is the law, and you have no right to go abroad until February 12,”” one worker recalled border guards saying when they prevented him from leaving Russia.

Russia’s Defense Ministry is also weighing an order that would fund [volunteer military units](#) with food, medical supplies, weapons, and uniforms, according to Meduza.

The Kremlin has attempted to throw cold water on the idea that Russia may be planning another mobilization—[Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov](#) sidestepped questions about it earlier this month, noting that rumors about a new mobilization shouldn’t necessarily be taken at face value. According to a Ukrainian intelligence assessment, however, Putin has ordered the commander of Russian troops in Ukraine to [take all of Donbas before March](#) and still has plans to surge fighting in the coming months.

Russia’s [new offensive might start as early as February or March](#), according to Bloomberg. There are other signs that Russia is on edge about how poorly the war is going, nearly one year in.

A satellite imagery analysis shared exclusively with The Daily Beast last week shows that [Russia has been building up a network of fortifications](#) in multiple layers throughout the front in Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson. The defensive fortifications, including trenches, mounds, and dragon’s teeth, suggest that Russia is preparing for a potential Ukrainian counteroffensive and will struggle to preserve what gains it has made in Eastern Ukraine.

The Institute for the Study of War assessed the fortifications could also indicate Russia is preparing for an offensive of its own in the coming weeks.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Taiwan, Czech leaders affirm ties
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/taiwan-czech-leaders-affirm-ties-defiance-beijing-96782385
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- Defying China, the president of self-ruled Taiwan affirmed the island's ties with the Czech Republic in a phone call with the Central European nation’s President-elect Petr Pavel.</p> <p>The call on Monday represents a symbolic breach of China’s attempts to cut off the already highly restricted foreign relations of the self-governing democracy, which Beijing claims as its own territory with no right to independent diplomatic recognition.</p> <p>In the call, President Tsai Ing-wen said the countries “enjoy deep ties and share the values of freedom, democracy, and human rights,” the official Central News Agency said, quoting presidential spokesperson Lin Yu-chan.</p> <p>“Based on these cordial ties, the government of Taiwan looked forward to deepening exchanges and cooperation with the Czech Republic in key areas, including semiconductor design, talent cultivation in cutting-edge technologies, and supply chain restructuring,” Lin was quoted as saying.</p> <p>China had no immediate comment, but in past has responded with condemnation and threats of retaliation over contacts with Taiwan by politicians whose countries have formal relations with Beijing.</p> <p>China in recent years has upped its threat to bring Taiwan under its control by force if necessary, prompting new sales of tanks and missiles to the island from key ally the U.S. and steps by Tsai's administration to extend compulsory military service and bolster the domestic defense industry.</p> <p>A string of visits in recent months by foreign politicians to Taiwan, including by then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and numerous politicians from the European Union, spurred displays of military might from both sides.</p>

	Taiwan has formal diplomatic ties with just 14 nations, mainly small states in the Caribbean and South Pacific, but maintains robust unofficial ties with more than 100 countries. European politicians, some of whose nations were formally dominated by the Soviet Union, have been among the most vocal in pursuing closer relations with Taiwan.
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HEADLINE	01/30 France: fighter jets to Ukraine not excluded
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/france-rule-sending-warplanes-ukraine-96770962
GIST	<p>THE HAGUE, The Netherlands -- President Emmanuel Macron said Monday that France doesn't exclude sending fighter jets to Ukraine, but laid out multiple conditions before such a significant step might be taken.</p> <p>France has sent Ukraine air-defense systems, rocket launcher units, cannons and other military equipment and has pledged to send armored surveillance and combat vehicles, but has stopped short of sending battle tanks or heavier weaponry.</p> <p>Asked at a news conference in The Hague on Monday if France is considering sending warplanes, Macron said "nothing is excluded" as long as certain conditions are met.</p> <p>Among those conditions: that providing such equipment would not lead to an escalation of tensions or be used "to touch Russian soil," and that it wouldn't "weaken the capacities of the French army," Macron said.</p> <p>He also said Ukraine would have to formally request the planes. He noted that he will meet visiting Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov in Paris on Tuesday.</p> <p>In Washington, asked by a reporter on Monday if his administration was considering sending Ukraine F16 fighter jets, U.S. President Joe Biden responded "no." Biden's deputy national security adviser, Jon Finer, said in an MSNBC interview last week that U.S. would discuss fighter jets "very carefully" with Ukraine and allies.</p> <p>In the first weeks of the war, the Biden administration looked at a proposal under which Poland would supply Ukraine with the MiG-29s and in turn receive American F-16s to make up for their loss. Ukrainian pilots are trained to fly the Soviet-era fighter jets.</p> <p>The idea was ultimately scuttled after Poland floated the idea of delivering the MiG-29s to a U.S. air base in Germany. Pentagon officials said at the time that the prospect of warplanes departing from a base used by the U.S. and NATO was not tenable.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials have been stepping up demands for heavier weapons from Western allies to push back Russia's forces.</p> <p>At Macron's side, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said Ukraine hasn't formally requested Dutch F16 fighter jets so far. He struck a cautious stance after the Dutch foreign minister told lawmakers earlier this month that there were "no taboos" about sending the warplanes.</p> <p>"There is no talk about delivering F-16s to Ukraine. No requests," Rutte said Monday. There are "no taboos, but it would be a very big next step."</p> <p>"It is very important we keep supporting Ukraine and that Ukraine articulates to us what they need," Rutte said.</p> <p>He welcomed recent German and U.S. announcements about sending tanks to Ukraine.</p>

	“As the Netherlands, we will keep looking at what we can do,” Rutte said. “We don’t have Leopard 2 tanks, we lease them. We’ve said if it helps we’re prepared to buy them and pass them on. Maybe it’s better to use those leased Leopard 2s somewhere else. ... Whatever works.”
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HEADLINE	01/30 Memphis PD relieves 2 from duty; FD fires 3
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/6th-officer-involved-tyre-nichols-death-relieved-duty/story?id=96764687
GIST	<p>Two additional Memphis police officers, including the white officer seen encountering Tyre Nichols during his traffic stop, were relieved of duty and three Memphis Fire Department personnel were fired as the investigation into the Jan. 7 death of Nichols continues, officials announced Monday.</p> <p>Officer Preston Hemphill and an unidentified officer were relieved of their duty a day after the incident, Memphis PD revealed Monday.</p> <p>The Memphis Fire Department also announced Monday that it fired two EMTs and a lieutenant who responded to the scene for failing to properly assess Nichols as he lay beaten on the ground.</p> <p>Hemphill, who is white, allegedly deployed his Taser during the confrontation. In his own body camera video, Hemphill is seen chasing Nichols down the road, but then turns back to the scene of the initial traffic stop.</p> <p>Hemphill was heard on his body camera video saying twice, "I hope they stomp his a--."</p> <p>Hemphill and the unidentified seventh officer haven't been fired or charged, according to the Memphis PD. "Officer Preston Hemphill and [the] other officer's actions and inactions have been and continue to be the subject of this investigation since its inception on January 8, 2023," the department said in a statement.</p> <p>Five other officers, who are all Black, were previously fired and charged with second-degree murder in connection with Nichols' beating at a traffic stop. Nichols, 29, died three days later.</p> <p>Hemphill's attorney, Lee Gerald, said earlier that Hemphill was the third officer at Nichols' initial traffic stop. The first body camera footage released Friday was from Hemphill's device.</p> <p>"As per departmental regulations Officer Hemphill activated his bodycam," Gerald said earlier in a statement. "He was never present at the second scene. He is cooperating with officials in this investigation."</p> <p>The Memphis FD revealed more details Monday about their members' actions during the incident.</p> <p>Memphis Fire Dispatch received a call from the Memphis PD at 8:31 p.m., to respond to a person pepper sprayed at the intersection of E. Raines Road and Ross Road, according to the fire department. An ambulance arrived at the scene and then directed to the second location where the cops encountered Nichols, the fire department said.</p> <p>EMT-Basic Robert Long and EMT-Advanced JaMicheal Sandridge made the scene where Tyre Nichols was located handcuffed on the ground leaning against a police vehicle, while an unidentified ambulance driver and Lt. Michelle Whitaker remained inside the vehicle at approximately 8:41 p.m., the according to the fire department.</p> <p>The department said the EMTs requested another ambulance to respond after their "initial interaction with Mr. Nichols," and the additional ambulance didn't arrive on the scene until 8:55 p.m.</p> <p>"Our investigation has concluded that the two EMTs responded based on the initial nature of the call (person pepper sprayed) and information they were told on the scene and failed to conduct an adequate patient assessment of Mr. Nichols," Memphis FD said in a statement.</p>

Long, Sandridge and Whitaker were all fired for violating "numerous MFD Policies and Protocols," the department said.

"Their actions or inactions on the scene that night do not meet the expectations of the Memphis Fire Department and are not reflective of the outstanding service the men and women of the Memphis Fire Department provide daily in our community," Memphis FD said in a statement.

The three former fire department personnel haven't been charged.

[Nichols' stepfather, Rodney Wells, told ABC News Live](#) on Friday night that he thinks "everyone [who] was active in the whole scene ... should be charged."

Attorneys for Nichols' family, Ben Crump and Antonio Romanucci, said they were extremely disappointed that Hemphill was relieved of duty but not fired or charged. The lawyers are also questioning why the Memphis police did not immediately announce Hemphill's name or that he was relieved of duty.

"Why is his identity and the role he played in Tyre's death just now coming to light?" they said in a statement. "We have asked from the beginning that the Memphis Police Department be transparent with the family and the community -- this news seems to indicate that they haven't risen to the occasion. It certainly begs the question why the white officer involved in this brutal attack was shielded and protected from the public eye, and to date, from sufficient discipline and accountability. The Memphis Police Department owes us all answers."

Shelby County District Attorney Steve Mulroy said in a statement Monday that the investigation was ongoing and more charges could be filed.

"We are looking at all individuals involved in the events leading up to, during, and after the beating of Tyre Nichols," the district attorney's office said. "This includes the officer present at the initial encounter who has not -- so far -- been charged, Memphis Fire Department personnel, and persons who participated in preparing documentation of the incident afterward."

"The DA's Office worked extraordinarily swiftly but thoroughly to charge those whose offenses were plain and clear and directly contributed to the death of Mr. Nichols, but in no way is this investigation over," the office added.

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Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	01/30 US halts export licenses to China's Huawei?
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/technology/us-stops-provision-licences-export-chinas-huawei-ft-2023-01-30/
GIST	<p>Jan 30 (Reuters) - The Biden administration has stopped approving licenses for U.S. companies to export most items to China's Huawei, according to three people familiar with the matter.</p> <p>Huawei has faced U.S. export restrictions around items for 5G and other technologies for several years, but officials in the U.S. Department of Commerce have granted licenses for some American firms to sell certain goods and technologies to the company. Qualcomm Inc in 2020 received permission to sell 4G smartphone chips to Huawei.</p> <p>A Commerce Department spokesperson said officials "continually assess our policies and regulations" but do not comment on talks with specific companies. Huawei and Qualcomm declined to comment. Bloomberg and the Financial Times earlier reported the move.</p>

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said that China opposes the United States abusing an overly broad notion of national security to suppress Chinese firms unreasonably.

The move "goes against the principles of the market economy and rules of international trade and finance, hurts the confidence the international community has in the U.S business environment and is blatant technological hegemony," Mao said during a press conference in Beijing on Tuesday.

One person familiar with the matter said U.S. officials are creating a new formal policy of denial for shipping items to Huawei that would include items below the 5G level, including 4G items, Wifi 6 and 7, artificial intelligence, and high-performance computing and cloud items.

Another person said the move was expected to reflect the Biden administration's tightening of policy on Huawei over the past year. Licenses for 4G chips that could not be used for 5g, which might have been approved earlier, were being denied, the person said. Toward the end of the Trump administration and early in the Biden administration, officials had still granted licenses for items specific to 4G applications.

American officials placed Huawei on a trade blacklist in 2019 restricting most U.S. suppliers from shipping goods and technology to the company unless they were granted licenses. Officials continued to tighten the controls to cut off Huawei's ability to buy or design the semiconductor chips that power most of its products.

But U.S. officials granted licenses that allowed Huawei to receive some products. For example, suppliers to Huawei got licenses worth \$61 billion to sell to the telecoms equipment giant from [April through November 2021](#).

In December, Huawei said its overall revenue was about \$91.53 billion, down only slightly from 2021 when U.S. sanctions caused its sales to fall by nearly a third.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Killnet attacks 14 hospitals websites
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/us/russia-hackers-ddos/2023/01/30/id/1106537/
GIST	<p>A pro-Russia hacker group known for cyberattacks on Russia's "enemies" has claimed responsibility for a Monday morning cyberattack on 14 American hospitals, the Daily Mail reports.</p> <p>Killnet brought down the websites through distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks.</p> <p>Hospitals affected included some of the top in the nation, such Stanford Healthcare, Duke University Hospital and Cedars-Sinai, according to the report.</p> <p>Seven of the hospital websites were back in service by noon ET, the Mail said, adding it was not clear why the specific websites were targeted by the group.</p> <p>Killnet has previously based its attacks in countries that oppose Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with targets including U.S. airports, banks, and defense contractors.</p> <p>Hospitals in the Netherlands also reported being impacted by a DDoS attack from Russian hackers.</p> <p>Whether internal systems or patient care was affected is not known, the Mail said, but the University of Michigan said it suffered no such impacts.</p> <p>DDoS attacks typically do nothing more than temporarily render a website useless.</p> <p>These attacks work by attempting to overwhelm a website's servers by flooding it with traffic, making it all but impossible to access.</p>

	<p>When banking giant JPMorgan Chase was targeted by Killnet in October, the bank said it had no impact on its operations. Similarly, many of the hospitals hit Monday continued posting on social media and did not even mention the issue.</p> <p>The real purpose of the attacks seems to be causing fear and doubt about the government's ability to control such issues, Brett Callow, a threat analyst with cybersecurity firm Emsisoft, previously told the Mail.</p> <p>Those affected included: Stanford Healthcare in California; Duke University Hospital in Durham, North Carolina; Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles, California; University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, in Pennsylvania; Jefferson Health in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Abrazo Health in Phoenix, Arizona; and Atlanticare, from Atlantic County, New Jersey; Michigan Medicine, in Ann Arbor, Michigan and its associated Mott Children's Hospital; Huntsville Hospital in Alabama; Anaheim Regional Medical Center in California; Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center in California; Buena Vista Regional Medical Center in Storm Lake, Iowa; and Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center in Salina, Colorado.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Info leak: Indianapolis Housing Agency
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/ransomware-attack-on-indianapolis-housing-agency-leaks-sensitive-info-on-200000-residents/
GIST	<p>The Indianapolis Housing Agency is notifying more than 200,000 people that their information, including Social Security numbers and more, was leaked during a ransomware attack in that began in September.</p> <p>The federally-funded agency is responsible for providing housing to low-income tenants across Indianapolis. It did not respond to requests for comment in October when the attack was revealed but reported the incident to the Maine Attorney General's office last week, explaining that 212,910 people were affected.</p> <p>The agency submitted two separate versions of the breach notification letter – one for adults affected and one for children who had information leaked in the incident.</p> <p>In the letters, the agency says the ransomware attack was discovered on October 4 when they noticed unusual activity in their IT environment. They noted that the breach started on September 23.</p> <p>Security experts were hired to investigate the incident and it was revealed that names, addresses, dates of birth and Social Security numbers were leaked during the attack.</p> <p>Victims are being provided with 12 months of IDX identity protection services that includes identity theft recovery services and a \$1,000,000 insurance reimbursement policy. The agency said IDX “will help resolve issues if your child’s identity is compromised.”</p> <p>In October, the Indianapolis Star reported that the attack crippled the agency’s ability to send more than 8,000 crucial rent payments to landlords operating under the Section 8 federal housing choice voucher program.</p> <p>The newspaper noted that in total, about 25,000 people rely on the agency for a variety of services and it also runs several public housing buildings.</p> <p>Employees of the agency were forced to send checks out manually and were locked out of email systems for days.</p> <p>The agency later told Fox59 that it had reported the attack to law enforcement.</p>

	<p>Housing authorities have been a ripe target for ransomware groups because of the sensitive information they carry about both residents and suppliers as well as employees.</p> <p>The LockBit ransomware group attacked the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles earlier this month and the Chattanooga Housing Authority in November. The attacks are part of a larger trend of ransomware groups targeting poorly resourced local government agencies across the United States.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Microsoft warns: update Exchange Servers
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/microsoft-warning-protect-this-critical-piece-of-your-tech-infrastructure/
GIST	<p>Microsoft is telling customers to apply its latest updates to shield Exchange Server from hackers that keep targeting the platform to access corporate mailboxes and nab company address books for phishing.</p> <p>"Attackers looking to exploit unpatched Exchange servers are not going to go away," Microsoft's Exchange team warns in an update.</p> <p>"We know that keeping your Exchange environment protected is critical, and we know it's never ending," it added.</p> <p>The warning from Redmond follows the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) earlier this month, ordering federal agencies to patch the Exchange bug CVE-2022-41080.</p> <p>Microsoft released an update for the elevation of privilege flaw in November, and researchers at CrowdStrike later found that attackers had combined it with CVE-2022-41082 -- one of the ProxyNotShell pair of bugs - to achieve remote code execution.</p> <p>Unpatched Exchange Server is a popular target because of the value of mailboxes and the fact that Exchange Server contains a copy of the company address book, which is useful for subsequent phishing attacks, Microsoft notes.</p> <p>Additionally, Exchange has "deep hooks" into permissions within Active Directory, and, in a hybrid environment, also gives an attacker access to the connected cloud environment.</p> <p>To defend your Exchange servers against attacks that exploit known vulnerabilities, you "must" install the latest supported cumulative update (CU), which is CU12 for Exchange Server 2019, CU23 for Exchange Server 2016, and CU23 for Exchange Server 2013, and the latest security update (SU), which is the January 2023 SU, Microsoft says.</p> <p>Admins only need to install the latest Exchange Server CUs and SU because they're cumulative updates. However, it recommends installing the latest CU and then checking to see if any SUs were released after the CU was released.</p> <p>Exchange Server came into focus in early 2021 after Microsoft patched four zero-day flaws, known as ProxyShell, which were exploited by China-backed, state-sponsored attackers. It was the first time Google Project Zero had seen Exchange Server zero days detected since it began tracking them in 2014.</p> <p>Microsoft is advising admins to always run Health Checker after installing an update to check for manual tasks required after the update. Health Checker provides links to step-by-step guidance.</p> <p>The tech giant also notes that it may release a mitigation for a known vulnerability ahead of releasing an SU. The automatically applied option is the Exchange Emergency Mitigation Service, and a manual option is the Exchange On-Premises Mitigation Tool.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Titan Stealer: Golang-based info stealer
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SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/titan-stealer-new-golang-based.html
GIST	<p>A new Golang-based information stealer malware dubbed Titan Stealer is being advertised by threat actors through their Telegram channel.</p> <p>"The stealer is capable of stealing a variety of information from infected Windows machines, including credential data from browsers and crypto wallets, FTP client details, screenshots, system information, and grabbed files," Uptycs security researchers Karthickkumar Kathiresan and Shilpesh Trivedi said in a recent report.</p> <p>Details of the malware were first documented by cybersecurity researcher Will Thomas (@BushidoToken) in November 2022 by querying the IoT search engine Shodan.</p> <p>Titan is offered as a builder, enabling customers to customize the malware binary to include specific functionalities and the kind of information to be exfiltrated from a victim's machine.</p> <p>The malware, upon execution, employs a technique known as process hollowing to inject the malicious payload into the memory of a legitimate process known as AppLaunch.exe, which is the Microsoft .NET ClickOnce Launch Utility.</p> <p>Some of the major web browsers targeted by Titan Stealer include Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Microsoft Edge, Yandex, Opera, Brave, Vivaldi, 7 Star Browser, Iridium Browser, and others. The crypto wallets singled out are Armory, Atomic, Bytecoin, Coinomi, Edge Wallet, Ethereum, Exodus, Guarda, Jaxx Liberty, and Zcash.</p> <p>It's also capable of gathering the list of installed applications on the compromised host and capturing data associated with the Telegram desktop app.</p> <p>The amassed information is subsequently transmitted to a remote server under the attacker's control as a Base64-encoded archive file. Furthermore, the malware comes with a web panel that enables adversaries to access the stolen data.</p> <p>The exact modus operandi used to distribute the malware is unclear as yet, but traditionally threat actors have leveraged a number of methods, such as phishing, malicious ads, and cracked software.</p> <p>"One of the primary reasons [threat actors] may be using Golang for their information stealer malware is because it allows them to easily create cross-platform malware that can run on multiple operating systems, such as Windows, Linux, and macOS," Cyble said in its own analysis of Titan Stealer.</p> <p>"Additionally, the Go compiled binary files are small in size, making them more difficult to detect by security software."</p> <p>The development arrives a little over two months after SEKOIA detailed another Go-based malware referred to as Aurora Stealer that's being put to use by several criminal actors in their campaigns.</p> <p>The malware is typically propagated via lookalike websites of popular software, with the same domains actively updated to host trojanized versions of different applications.</p> <p>It has also been observed taking advantage of a method known as padding to artificially inflate the size of the executables to as much as 260MB by adding random data in a bid to evade detection by antivirus software.</p> <p>The findings also come close on the heels of a malware campaign that has been observed delivering Raccoon and Vidar using hundreds of fake websites masquerading as legitimate software and games as part of a campaign since at least 2020.</p>

	Team Cymru, in an analysis published earlier this month, noted that "Vidar operators have split their infrastructure into two parts; one dedicated to their regular customers and the other for the management team, and also potentially premium / important users."
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HEADLINE	01/31 GitHub breach: code-signing certs stolen
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/github-breach-hackers-stole-code.html
GIST	<p>GitHub on Monday disclosed that unknown threat actors managed to exfiltrate encrypted code signing certificates pertaining to some versions of GitHub Desktop for Mac and Atom apps.</p> <p>As a result, the company is taking the step of revoking the exposed certificates out of abundance of caution. The following versions of GitHub Desktop for Mac have been invalidated: 3.0.2, 3.0.3, 3.0.4, 3.0.5, 3.0.6, 3.0.7, 3.0.8, 3.1.0, 3.1.1, and 3.1.2.</p> <p>Versions 1.63.0 and 1.63.1 of 1.63.0 of Atom are also expected to stop working as of February 2, 2023, requiring that users downgrade to a previous version (1.60.0) of the source code editor. Atom was officially discontinued in December 2022. GitHub Desktop for Windows is not affected.</p> <p>The Microsoft-owned subsidiary said it detected unauthorized access to a set of repositories, including those from deprecated GitHub-owned organizations, used in the planning and development of GitHub Desktop and Atom on December 7, 2022.</p> <p>The repositories are said to have been cloned a day before by a compromised personal access token (PAT) associated with a machine account. None of the repositories contained customer data, and the compromised credentials have since been revoked. GitHub did not disclose how the token was breached.</p> <p>"Several encrypted code signing certificates were stored in these repositories for use via Actions in our GitHub Desktop and Atom release workflows," GitHub's Alexis Wales said. "We have no evidence that the threat actor was able to decrypt or use these certificates."</p> <p>It's worth pointing out that a successful decryption of the certificates could permit an adversary to sign trojanized applications with these certificates and pass them off as originating from GitHub.</p> <p>The three compromised certificates – two Digicert code signing certificates used for Windows and one Apple Developer ID certificate – are set for revocation on February 2, 2023.</p> <p>The code hosting platform also said it released a new version of the Desktop app on January 4, 2023, that's signed with new certificates that were not exposed to the threat actor. It further emphasized that no unauthorized changes were made to the code in these repositories.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Vulnerabilities in OpenEMR software
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/vulnerabilities-in-openemr-healthcare-software-expose-patient-data/
GIST	<p>Vulnerabilities in the OpenEMR healthcare software could allow remote attackers to steal sensitive patient data or execute arbitrary commands and take over systems.</p> <p>OpenEMR is an open source software used for the management of health records. It also allows patients to schedule appointments, get in touch with physicians, and pay invoices.</p> <p>Security researchers at Sonar Source identified and reported three vulnerabilities in OpenEMR, including two that can be chained to achieve remote code execution (RCE).</p> <p>"A combination of these vulnerabilities allows remote attackers to execute arbitrary system commands on any OpenEMR server and to steal sensitive patient data. In the worst case, they can compromise the entire critical infrastructure," Sonar warns.</p>

The first of the identified issues is described as an unauthenticated arbitrary file read and exists because the OpenEMR installer does not delete itself after the installation is completed.

Because the installation process is divided into several steps, an unauthenticated attacker could abuse a user-controlled parameter to perform some of these steps (but not a complete setup).

The attacker can invoke a function to read the current theme from the database, which results in a database connection being established using attacker-controlled properties.

A MySQL statement can be used to load the contents of a file to the database table, and a modifier can be supplied so that the file is read from the client instead of the server.

“A malicious server can request the content of another file, even in response to a totally different query from the client,” Sonar notes.

This allows an unauthenticated attacker to use a rogue MySQL server to read OpenEMR files such as backups, certificates, passwords, and tokens.

Sonar also discovered that an attacker could abuse a cross-site scripting (XSS) flaw to execute JavaScript code in the victim’s browser. The attacker can upload a PHP file and exploit a local file inclusion (LFI) to achieve RCE.

The XSS exists because, when requesting a PHP file, the browser first renders the HTML code, and only then the JavaScript context, which allows the attacker to use HTML entities within an event handler.

The LFI, Sonar explains, exists because a user-controlled variable is concatenated to a path and not sanitized, which allows an attacker to upload a PHP file and use a path traversal via the LFI to execute the file.

Sonar reported the security defects in October 2022. One month later, the vendor patched all bugs by adding sessions and CSRF checks and restricting the installation process, by encoding the character ‘&’ for an HTML entity to prevent the XSS, and by sanitizing the user-controlled parameter to prevent the LFI.

[OpenEMR version 7.0.0](#) resolves all vulnerabilities. Users are advised to update their installations as soon as possible.

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HEADLINE	01/30 APT29 new malware in embassy attacks
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/russia-linked-apt29-uses-new-malware-in-embassy-attacks/
GIST	<p>Russia-linked cyberespionage group APT29 has been observed staging new malware for attacks likely targeting embassy-related individuals, Recorded Future reports.</p> <p>Also referred to as Cozy Bear, the Dukes, Nobelium, and Yttrium, APT29 is a Russian advanced persistent threat (APT) group believed to be sponsored by the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR). It’s also believed to have orchestrated multiple high-profile attacks, including the 2020 SolarWinds attack.</p> <p>In October 2022, Recorded Future identified new infrastructure and malware that the cyberespionage group likely set up for attacks targeting embassy staff or an ambassador.</p> <p>A compromised site containing the text “Ambassador’s schedule November 2022” was used as a lure to infect visitors with new malware called GraphicalNeutrino.</p>

The threat, which uses the US-based business automation service Notion for command and control (C&C), is a loader that packs numerous anti-analysis capabilities, including sandbox evasion, API unhooking, and string encryption.

According to Recorded Future, which tracks the activity as [BlueBravo](#) (PDF), the staging and deployment of the malware is similar to previously observed tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) attributed to APT29.

The lure webpage contained within HTML code an obfuscated ZIP file set to be automatically downloaded on the visitors' system, showing overlaps with previous observed deployment of [the EnvyScout dropper](#).

The ZIP file contains two DLLs and a benign executable masquerading as a PDF, which was designed to load the libraries using DLL search order hijacking. One of the DLLs contains the GraphicalNeutrino malware, implemented in a thread spawned when the library is initialized.

When launched, GraphicalNeutrino attempts to remove API hooks from specific modules, checks whether persistence is required (which it achieves by creating a new registry key), and then establishes communication with the C&C.

The malware creates a unique identifier for the victim, based on username and computer name, adds the ItIEQ prefix to it, and then uses a Notion API database query filter to determine whether the victim has previously connected to the C&C.

A second, nearly identical GraphicalNeutrino sample that Recorded Future identified and which was compiled only two days after the first, contained only small changes, such as a different Notion database ID, a new identifier prefix, a new key for string decryption, a renamed DLL export function, and modified wait time for C&C communication.

"While we are unable to assess the intended targets of this operation based on the data available, it is likely that ambassadorial or embassy-themed lures are particularly effective during periods of heightened geopolitical tensions, such as is the case with the ongoing war in Ukraine. During such periods, Russian APT groups are highly likely to make extensive use of diplomatically themed lures," Recorded Future notes.

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HEADLINE	01/30 TrickGate software to deploy Emotet, REvil
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/hackers-use-trickgate-software/
GIST	<p>A malicious live software service named TrickGate has been used by threat actors to bypass endpoint detection and response (EDR) protection software for over six years.</p> <p>The findings come from Check Point Research (CPR), who shared them with <i>Infosecurity</i> earlier today. Described in a new advisory, the research also suggests that several threat actors from groups such as Emotet, REvil, Maze and more exploited the service to deploy malware.</p> <p>More specifically, CPR estimated that, throughout the last two years, threat actors conducted between 40 and 650 attacks per week using TrickGate. Victims were located mainly in the manufacturing sector but also in education, healthcare, finance and business enterprises.</p> <p>"The attacks are distributed all over the world, with an increased concentration in Taiwan and Turkey," CPR wrote. "The most popular malware family used in the last two months is Formbook, marking 42% of the total tracked distribution."</p> <p>According to CPR, TrickGate managed to stay under the radar for years due to its transformative property of undergoing periodic changes.</p>

	<p>“While the packer's wrapper changed over time, the main building blocks within TrickGate shellcode are still in use today,” reads the advisory.</p> <p>From a technical standpoint, CPR security researcher Arie Olshtein wrote that the malicious program is encrypted and then packed with a special routine, which is in turn designed to bypass the protected system to prevent systems from detecting the payload statically and on run-time.</p> <p>Further, CPR malware research and protection group manager Ziv Huyan told <i>Infosecurity</i> that the team managed to connect the dots from previous research and point to a single operation that seemed to be offered as a service.</p> <p>“The fact that many of the biggest threat actors in recent years have been choosing TrickGate as a tool to overcome defensive systems, is remarkable,” Huyan explained.</p> <p>“We monitored the appearance of TrickGate, written by utilizing different types of code language and using different file types. But the core flow remained relatively stable. The same techniques used six years ago are still in use today.”</p> <p>Another piece of malware designed to evade detection is SparkRAT, which was recently deployed by the DragonSpark group to target East Asian organizations.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 'No Fly' list shared on hacking forum
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/us-no-fly-list-shared-on-a-hacking-forum-government-investigating/
GIST	<p>A U.S. No Fly list with over 1.5 million records of banned flyers and upwards of 250,000 'selectees' has been shared publicly on a hacking forum.</p> <p>BleepingComputer has confirmed the list is the same TSA No Fly list that was discovered recently on an unsecured CommuteAir server.</p> <p>No Fly list made public</p> <p>This month, Swiss hacker maia arson crimew (formerly Tillie Kottmann), stumbled upon a misconfigured AWS server containing TSA's No Fly list, as first reported by <i>Daily Dot</i> journalist Mikael Thalen.</p> <p>The server in question belonged to Ohio-based airline CommuteAir. Although steps were taken earlier to patch the leak, the No Fly list regardless surfaced online as of January 26th on a publicly-accessible hacking forum:</p> <p>We verified with Thalen and another source that the lists posted on the forum are the same no-fly and selectee lists that were recently discovered on the CommuteAir server.</p> <p>BleepingComputer reviewed a portion of these lists—provided as two CSV files named, 'NOFLY' and 'SELECTEE.' The latter list likely names some of the passengers who undergo a Secondary Security Screening Selection (SSSS) at airports when flying into the U.S.</p> <p>The no-fly spreadsheet posted on the forum contains 1,566,062 records, and includes duplicates/spelling variations of some names. The 'SELECTEE' list comprises 251,169 records. The presence of duplicates and aliases in the list implies the total number of exposed names are fewer than 1.5 million.</p> <p>Both spreadsheets contain a person's first name, last name, potential aliases, and date of birth. The lists, according to the hacker, are from the year 2019.</p> <p>The list mentions Russian arms dealer, Viktor Bout along with his 16 potential aliases, the <i>Daily Dot</i> observed.</p>

FBI's [TSC](#) (Terrorist Screening Center) is relied upon by multiple federal agencies to manage and share consolidated information for counterterrorism purposes. The agency maintains a watchlist called the Terrorist Screening Database, sometimes also referred to as the "[No Fly list](#)."

Such databases are secretive, even if not "classified" and regarded as sensitive in nature, given the vital role they play in aiding with national security and law enforcement tasks. Terrorists or reasonable suspects who pose a national security risk are "nominated" for placement on the secret watchlist at the government's discretion.

The No Fly list is generally withheld from the public eye. The list is, however, referenced by private airlines and multiple agencies such as the Department of State, Department of Defense, [Transportation Security Agency \(TSA\)](#), and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to check if a passenger is allowed to fly, inadmissible to the U.S. or assess their risk for various other activities.

Researchers including Bob Diachenko have previously discovered [secret terrorist watchlists left exposed](#) on the internet, but these leaks were patched long before receiving mainstream news coverage. This is the first time, however, such a list has been shared on a publicly accessible website for anyone to see.

Interestingly, the list discovered in 2021 by Diachenko was rather detailed: containing fields such as names, gender, passport number along with the country of issuance, TSC ID, watchlist ID, etc. compared to the one published on the forum this month.

U.S. Government investigating

Although the security breach originated at an exposed AWS server belonging to an airline, it has sent chills down the U.S. government machinery, with government officials and lawmakers probing into the matter.

TSA has been investigating the cybersecurity incident.

"On January 27, TSA issued a security directive to airports and air carriers," a TSA spokesperson told BleepingComputer in an updated statement.

"The security directive reinforces existing requirements on handling sensitive security information and personally identifiable information. We will continue to work with partners to ensure that they implement security requirements to safeguard systems and networks from cyberattacks."

A source familiar with the matter told BleepingComputer that no TSA information systems were compromised as part of this breach. Additionally, the federal agency has issued an Industry Security Awareness message to all aircraft carriers to review their systems and take immediate action to ensure their files are protected.

In a statement shared with BleepingComputer, a CommuteAir spokesperson said:

"CommuteAir was notified by a member of the security research community who identified a misconfigured development server. The researcher accessed files uploaded to the server in July 2022 that included outdated 2019 versions of the federal no-fly and selectee lists that contained certain individuals' names and dates of birth. The lists were used for testing our software-based compliance process for implementing federally-mandated security requirements. Additionally, through the server, the researcher accessed a database containing personal identifiable information of CommuteAir employees. CommuteAir immediately took the affected server offline and started an investigation to determine the extent of data access. To date, our investigation indicates that no customer data was exposed. CommuteAir has reported the data exposure to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, and also notified its employees."

BleepingComputer has approached the FBI for comment.

U.S. Congressman [Dan Bishop](#) along with Homeland Security Committee chairman Dr. Mark Green [have posed a series of vital questions](#) to the TSA Administrator, David Peter Pekoske.

An important point to note is, more than just a data leak discovery, the incident may now become a matter of national security, given the claims made by the hacker:

"Additionally, the hacker claimed they may have been able to exploit their access to the server to cancel or delay flights and even switch out crew members. If this were to be the case, the national security implications of this are alarming," write the U.S. Homeland Security Committee Members in a letter dated January 26th:

The transport systems sector is among the 16 critical infrastructure sectors in the U.S., states the letter. "The notion that such a consequential database be left unsecure is a matter concerning cybersecurity, aviation security, as well as civil rights and liberties."

The hacker, maia arson crimew, previously known by aliases *deletescape*, *antiproprietary*, and Tillie Kottmann, was earlier [indicted by a U.S. grand jury](#) over conspiracy, wire fraud, and aggravated identity theft charges ([PDF](#)).

The hacker was formerly [involved in the Verkada hack](#), enabling her to gain unauthorized access to security cameras at Tesla, Cloudflare, and offices of various Verkada client organizations.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Fraud: impersonating financial advisers
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/remote-workforce/long-con-impersonates-financial-advisers-target-victims
GIST	<p>Fraudsters have donned the identities of legitimate US financial advisers in an effort to gain the trust of victims, before recommending fraudulent financial investments.</p> <p>According to threat intelligence service DomainTools, the con artists, most of whom appear to be located in West Africa, have advertised on popular social media platforms, including TikTok, using the information of actual financial advisers, copying personal biographical information and work details.</p> <p>Their goal is to gain the confidence of their victims using messaging applications and email, and then convincing the individuals to invest in fraudulent cryptocurrency schemes. To date, the fraudsters have successfully stolen millions of dollars, according to a DomainTools research note.</p> <p>In the end, there are two types of victims in this fraud campaign, says Sean McNee, CTO of DomainTools. "Obviously the first are the consumers who are tricked into investing their money — often in the millions — then losing it through cryptocurrency and other investment scams," he says. "The second are the financial advisers, whose professional identities are being brazenly impersonated, putting their reputations and credibility at stake, not only today but for future business relationships as well."</p> <p>Fraud strategies that exploit an existing relationship by stealing someone's identity or that create a new relationship are often the most effective types of crime. Business email compromise (BEC), for example, where the cybercriminal poses as a business executive or a vendor, usually tops the list of damaging cybercrimes, doubling its share of the cybercrime ecosystem last year. The attacks also accounted for \$2.4 billion of the losses tallied by the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) in 2021, or about a third of the \$6.9 billion in losses tracked by the agency.</p> <p>DomainTools also verified that the fraudsters seemingly understood the often-impenetrable subject of personal finance.</p> <p>"Financial advisor impersonation is straightforward conceptually, but simplicity in subject belies complexity in practice," the company stated in its advisory. "Financial impersonation scams require careful, layered deception involving significant interaction with a target to succeed. To that point, engagements as</p>

prospective clients with several financial advisor impersonators suggest they possess a competent understanding of financial markets."

A Form of "Pig Butchering"

DomainTools called the investment scam a variant of "pig butchering" — the latest term for a romance scam that essentially "fattens up" a victim by creating trust through a relationship, which then ends in financial fraud — the "butchering" part. The fraudsters used the identities of several hundred financial advisers, deploying a fake website on a custom domains for each identity and using known social media networks to communicate with victims, DomainTools stated.

"While many of these instances start through establishing a relationship — whether romantic, or just friendly — this is the first time we've seen such an extensive campaign to build trust with — fake — professional financial advisers," McNee says. "Through our research, we were able to ascertain that the threat actors impersonating the financial advisers showed quite a surprisingly high level of financial expertise, and so were convincing to their victims."

The details used to impersonate financial advisers appear to have been scraped from regulatory filings posted to Financial Industry Regulatory Authority's (FINRA) BrokerCheck and the Securities and Exchange Commission's (SEC) Investment Adviser Public Disclosure sites.

"These scams rely on slowly building trust with a target — often under the guise of a financial advisor or successful investor — in order to convince targets to invest in a scam, such as a cryptocurrency 'investment,' in which their funds are promptly stolen and rendered nearly impossible to recover," DomainTools stated in its research note.

Supported by Bulletproof Hosting Service

The campaign is not just reliant on knowledgeable fraudsters for its success. The scam is also supported by a bulletproof hosting service known as SpeedHost247, DomainTools stated. Serving a wide variety of criminal enterprises, bulletproof-hosting services are a common cybercriminal service that ignores requests for takedowns, uses difficult-to-disrupt cloud architectures, and accepts cryptocurrency to obscure financial transactions.

The cluster of financial fraud activities tracked by DomainTools appears to "share orbits" with SpeedHost247, which operates out of West Africa, the company's researchers stated. SpeedHost247 has donned the mantle of a legitimate service, showing office buildings and spaces on its website. In reality, the images are modified pictures from other companies' sites, according to DomainTools' analysis.

"Whether SpeedHost247 is an active participant in financial advisor impersonation scams remains an open question," DomainTools stated in the analysis, "but their seeming willingness to accommodate dubious customers who are offering even more dubious financial services using false information, is reason for pause."

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HEADLINE	01/30 Cybercrime underground gig economy
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/risk/cybercrime-ecosystem-spawns-lucrative-underground-gig-economy
GIST	<p>Over a 30-month period, cybercriminal gangs and threat groups posted more than 200,000 advertisements seeking workers with skills in software development, maintaining IT infrastructure, and designing fraudulent sites and email campaigns.</p> <p>The demand for technically skilled individuals continues, but it peaked during the coronavirus pandemic, with double the average job advertisements coming during March 2020, the first month of the pandemic, according to a new report from cybersecurity firm Kaspersky. The analysis collected messages from 155 Dark Web forums posted between January 2020 and June 2022, selecting those that mentioned employment — either posted by a cybercriminals groups or sent by individuals seeking work.</p>

The lion's share (83%) of employment-related posts were threat groups seeking highly skilled workers, including developers (61%), attack specialists (16%), and fraudulent website designers (10%).

Improving defenses have forced attackers to improve their tools and techniques, driving the need for more technical specialists, explains Polina Bochkareva, a security services analyst at Kaspersky.

"Business related to illegal activities is growing on underground markets, and technologies are developing along with it," she says. "All this leads to the fact that attacks are also developing, which requires more skilled workers."

The underground jobs data highlights the surge in activity in cybercriminal services and the professionalization of the cybercrime ecosystem. Ransomware groups have become much more efficient as they have turned specific facets of operations into services, such as offering ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS), running bug bounties, and creating sales teams, [according to a December report](#). In addition, initial access brokers [have productized](#) the opportunistic compromise of enterprise networks and systems, often selling that access to ransomware groups.

Such division of labor requires technically skilled people to develop and support the complex features, [the Kaspersky report stated](#).

"The ads we analyzed also suggest that a substantial number of people are willing to engage in illicit or semilegal activities despite the accompanying risks," the report stated. "In particular, many turn to the shadow market for extra income in a crisis."

Pandemic Caused a Spike

In early 2020, such a crisis caused a surge in activity on Dark Web forums.

The pandemic — with its sudden layoffs and work-from-home mandates — drove significant activity in the cybercrime underground, and the highest number of employment-related posts appeared in 2020.

Overall, the year accounted for 41% of advertisements and job-seeking inquiries that were posted on the Dark Web — about average. March 2020, however, was the first month of worldwide lockdowns and saw about 6% of all postings, about double the average rate.

"Some ... living in the region suffered from reduction of income, took a mandatory furlough, or lost their jobs altogether, which subsequently resulted in rising unemployment levels," Kaspersky stated in the report. "Some jobseekers lost all hope to find steady, legitimate employment and began to search on Dark Web forums, spawning a surge of resumes there. As a result, we observed the highest ad numbers, both from prospective employers and jobseekers."

Personal crises also appeared to cause some technically inclined workers to seek employment from cybercriminals groups. A common refrain among the job advertisements is that applicants should not have substance addictions.

"Teamwork skills, stable connection, no alcohol or drug addictions," read the translated requirements for one job posting included in the Kaspersky report.

"Dirty Jobs"

In many cases, the Dark Web jobs offered terms similar to those for legitimate jobs, such as full-time employment, paid time off, and regular pay increases, with salaries starting from \$1,300 to \$4,000 per month. Yet most also did not have an employment contract, and only 10% included a pledge to promptly pay salaries.

The report dubbed the underground employment opportunities as "dirty jobs."

	<p>"Many are drawn by expectations of easy money and large financial gain," the report stated. "Most times, this is only an illusion. Salaries offered on the Dark Web are seldom significantly higher than those you can earn legally."</p> <p>Reverse engineers had the highest potential median salaries at \$4,000 a month, with attack specialists and developers having the No. 2 and No. 3 most lucrative salaries, with promises of \$2,500 and \$2,000. However, the majority of offers (61%) focused on developers.</p> <p>Those workers are the key to the cybercriminal underground, Kaspersky's Bochkareva says.</p> <p>"The most sought-after professionals were developers and attack specialists, particularly for coding malicious programs, phishing websites, and planning and implementing attacks," she says.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 JD Sports breach impacts 10M customers
SOURCE	https://www.bankinfosecurity.com/jd-sports-details-data-breach-affecting-10-million-customers-a-21045?web_view=true
GIST	<p>JD Sports, a British-based sports fashion retailer with outlets around the globe, says hackers stole data pertaining to "approximately 10 million unique customers."</p> <p>The company says the breach stems from a system containing customer data "relating to some online orders placed between November 2018 and October 2020" and that customers are at risk from scammers.</p> <p>The company, which trades on the London Stock Exchange and is majority owned by London-based Pentland Group, operates thousands of physical stores in multiple countries.</p> <p>In a Monday data breach notification, the company says the security incident affects online customers of six of its sports fashion and outdoor clothing store brands: JD, Size?, Millets, Blacks, Scotts and MilletSport.</p> <p>Exposed information includes a customer's name, billing address, delivery address, email address, phone number and order details. It also includes the last four digits of a customer's payment card. The company says it does not store full payment card data.</p> <p>The company "has no reason to believe that account passwords were accessed."</p> <p>JD Sports is warning customers to be "on the lookout for any suspicious or unusual communications purporting to be from JD Sports or any of our group brands."</p> <p>Based on notifications received by customers, the breach appears to affect individuals in the United Kingdom and multiple other countries.</p> <p>"We are continuing with a full review of our cybersecurity in partnership with external specialists following this incident," said company Chief Financial Officer Neil Greenhalgh.</p> <p>Across all of its different brands, JD Sports operates 3,402 stores in 32 territories, according to its 2022 annual report. The company's stores are predominantly located in the U.K., and are also in Ireland and other parts of the EU. JD Sports also operates stores in Asia-Pacific, the United States and Canada.</p> <p>The company declined to comment on when the breach began, when it was detected and how, and where all affected customers reside.</p> <p>JD Sports in its breach notification says it has notified Britain's Information Commissioner's Office, which enforces the U.K. General Data Protection Regulation. Under GDPR, once an organization believes it may have suffered a breach of personal data, it must alert a relevant authority within 72 hours.</p>

	One regulatory question to be answered about the JD Sports breach will be if the company was complying with GDPR's data minimization rules, given that some of the exposed data is now more than four years old. Under GDPR, any organization that collects or processes personal data must collect only as much as it needs - and is allowed - and delete the data in a timely manner.
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HEADLINE	01/30 Untold story crippling ransomware attack
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/ransomware-attack-recovery-hackney/
GIST	<p>IT WAS A Sunday morning in mid-October 2020 when Rob Miller first heard there was a problem. The databases and IT systems at Hackney Council, in East London, were suffering from outages. At the time, the UK was heading into its second deadly wave of the coronavirus pandemic, with millions living under lockdown restrictions and normal life severely disrupted. But for Miller, a strategic director at the public authority, things were about to get much worse. “By lunchtime, it was apparent that it was more than technical stuff,” Miller says.</p> <p>Two days later, the leaders of Hackney Council—which is one of London’s 32 local authorities and responsible for the lives of more than 250,000 people—revealed it had been hit by a cyberattack. Criminal hackers had deployed ransomware that severely crippled its systems, limiting the council’s ability to look after the people who depend on it. The Pysa ransomware gang later claimed responsibility for the attack and, weeks later, claimed to be publishing data it stole from the council.</p> <p>Today, more than two years later, Hackney Council is still dealing with the colossal aftermath of the ransomware attack. For around a year, many council services weren’t available. Crucial council systems—including housing benefit payments and social care services—weren’t functioning properly. While its services are now back up and running, parts of the council are still not operating as they were prior to the attack.</p> <p>A WIRED analysis of dozens of council meetings, minutes, and documents reveals the scale of disruption the ransomware caused to the council and, crucially, the thousands of people it serves. People’s health, housing situations, and finances suffered as a result of the insidious criminal group’s attack. The attack against Hackney stands out not just because of its severity, but also the amount of time it has taken for the organization to recover and help people in need.</p> <p>Ransom Demands</p> <p>You can think of local governments as complex machines. They’re made up of thousands of people running hundreds of services that touch almost every part of a person’s life. Most of this work goes unnoticed until something goes wrong. For Hackney, the ransomware attack ground the machine to a halt.</p> <p>Among the hundreds of services Hackney Council provides are social and children’s care, waste collection, benefits payments to people in need of financial support, and public housing. Many of these services are run using in-house technical systems and services. In many ways, these can be considered critical infrastructure, making the Hackney Council not dissimilar to hospitals or energy providers.</p> <p>“The attacks against public sector organizations, like local councils, schools, or universities, are quite powerful,” says Jamie MacColl, a cybersecurity and threat researcher at the RUSI think tank who is researching the societal impact of ransomware. “It’s not like the energy grids going down or like a water supply being disrupted ... but it’s things that are crucial to the day-to-day existence.”</p> <p>All the systems hosted on Hackney’s servers were impacted, Miller told councilors at one public meeting assessing the ransomware attack in 2022. Social care, housing benefits, council tax, business rates, and housing services were some of the most impacted. Databases and records weren’t accessible—the council has not paid any ransom demand. “Most of our data and our IT systems that were creating that data were not available, which really had a devastating impact on the services we were able to provide, but the work that we do as well,” Lisa Stidle, the data and insight manager at Hackney Council, said in a talk about the council’s recovery last year.</p>

One person living with disabilities in Hackney, who asked not to be named for privacy reasons, says they applied for social care at the end of June 2021—eight months after the cyberattack first hit—but didn't end up with a care plan or visits from carers until February 2022. "I could not wash myself. I couldn't wash my own hair," they say. "And the reason for that delay, they repeatedly told me, was the hack." The person recalls that when they first heard back from the council, months after initially getting in touch, the worker they spoke with was relieved they were still alive, as their situation hadn't been clear and there had been a delay in the case.

Since the ransomware attack, Hackney residents have told independent complaints boards how they suffered. At one point during the aftermath of the cyberattack and the ongoing pandemic, Hackney had a backlog of around [7,000 home repairs](#). A Housing Ombudsman report [from May 2022](#) said Hackney was responsible for "severe maladministration" leading to "substantial delays" in dealing with "damp, mold, and leaks" at one person's home. While Hackney had lost its records in the cyberattack, the Ombudsman said the council didn't make enough efforts to check emails (which were still available) or interview staff about the case. (The attack "impacted on our ability to retrieve our housing management and repairs data, as well as historic records, and sadly impeded our ability to investigate the resident's complaint," the council said.)

The council was also criticized because its system for reporting noise complaints [wasn't working](#). There was a [backlog of council tax payments](#). It was also unable to investigate people's complaints properly, as [records weren't available](#). The loss of housing records and people's correspondence led to "large numbers" of complaints to the council in the first months after the attacks, according to [council reports](#). In one instance, a resident hadn't been able to [use their kitchen for over a year](#), and work was partially delayed because the cyberattack made the building plans inaccessible. And in July 2022, [ITV News reported](#) a family of seven living in Hackney was forced to leave their home because the council wasn't able to update their housing benefit payments.

Hackney Council and Philip Glanville, the mayor of Hackney, have apologized for the impact the attack has had on residents. In response to the Ombudsman decisions, the council says it accepts the findings and apologizes to "all of those who have been affected as a result of the criminal action that left us unable to help some of the most vulnerable in our borough."

Miller says the devastating impact of the attack highlights how many "critical services" the council operates and the dangerous nature of ransomware attacks. "All of the things we do matter to someone," he says. "But some of the things really are very acute." He says the council prioritized high-risk cases during its recovery from the attack but that the impact has still been wide-ranging. "Over time, the number of residents affected has become fewer. But if you're a resident who's affected, that doesn't matter."

Ever since the ransomware hit Hackney Council, it has refused to comment on the technical aspects of the incident, citing ongoing investigations from the UK's National Crime Agency and the data regulator, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), which could [potentially fine the organization](#). The ICO says its investigation is ongoing and hasn't provided a timeline for completion.

Criminal hackers have frequently attacked local governments and public organizations in recent years. [Hospitals and medical carers](#), [city governments](#), and [entire national governments](#) have been attacked by ruthless ransomware gangs. Eleanor Fairford, the deputy director of incident management at the UK's National Cybersecurity Center, which is part of the intelligence agency GCHQ and helped Hackney, says ransomware is the "most significant" threat to both public services and businesses.

"Incidents can affect every aspect of an organization—from impeding its ability to deliver key operations to hitting finances—and effects are felt in the short- as well as longer-term," Fairford says, pointing to its [guidance on protection from ransomware](#). The cyberattack has cost Hackney [at least £12 million](#) (\$14.8 million), with several of its services reporting budget overspend to fix issues.

Lizzie Cookson, the director of incident response at ransomware recovery firm Coveware, says that in the final three months of last year, public sector ransomware victims it saw accounted for 13 percent of victims. “That’s pretty high,” Cookson says, adding that public services are often underfunded and underresourced. Attacks against the sector can cause untold long tail damage to society, with the damage felt by thousands over months and years. Miller says the impact on Hackney shows how “poisonous” ransomware attacks can be. “It’s easy to assume it’s faceless and doesn’t really have a big impact,” he says. “But it has that human impact.”

In addition to the impact on Hackney’s residents, the cyberattack has naturally affected the staff at the organization. Hundreds of staff at Hackney Council have had to work through the disruption, trying to help people despite little or no access to databases and case files. “When there’s an incident like this, it can cause a lot of stress and anxiety and upset for the people who are involved,” says Jessica Barker, the co-CEO of cybersecurity company Cygenta, who has followed the Hackney attack. Barker adds that for people involved in the technical recovery, there can be stress and burnout, and for those involved in helping citizens, it may have added extra time to their jobs.

Hackney’s Children and Families Service—which initially lost its social care management and document management systems—acknowledged the toll the attack had on staff in an annual report. It said “morale in some parts of the service may be lower” because of the pandemic and the ransomware attack. It also said the “legacy of the cyberattack in October 2020 cannot be understated.”

Miller says he is “proud” of the way staff at Hackney have responded but admits it has been hard on those working there. “People come into public service because we want to do things right, you give residents and citizens the services they need, we want to make life better for them,” he says. “To be in a position where people have had to put huge amounts of effort in, and they’ve known that they’re delivering less than they would normally expect to deliver—I think that’s been really tough for people. They care about what it means for our residents.”

The Road Ahead

In many ways, Hackney Council is an outlier. The vast majority of ransomware victims don’t talk about the attacks they’ve faced. They refer to opaque “cyber incidents” and “sophisticated attackers” but refuse to answer questions. Hackney has been more transparent than most.

While Hackney’s recovery has been hard and slow, Miller says steps to modernize its technology and move its services to cloud hosting meant it didn’t shut down entirely. The council’s email systems, messaging platforms, and website were still working. It wasn’t entirely reduced to pen and paper. Council leaders would hold daily “Cyber GOLD” emergency meetings for leaders to roll out business plans.

During the recovery, Miller says, there would be emergency meetings for responding to the pandemic and the ransomware attack simultaneously. One year after the attack, the council [said](#) its services were all back but not running as normal.

Allan Liska, an analyst for security firm Recorded Future who specializes in ransomware, says the recovery process can take longer than many people would expect. “At least for the first couple of weeks, you generally have staff working around the clock,” Liska says, adding that it can often take local governments six months to get back up and running, though two years isn’t uncommon. After the initial scramble to work out what has happened technically, backups (if they exist) need to be restored and handled carefully. “Recovery has to be measured not to reintroduce ransomware into the network,” Liska says.

Hackney prioritized council services—such as children’s and social care—for recovery, Miller says. And while services were affected, “continuity plans” helped them continue to operate, and schedules meant trash wasn’t piling up in the streets. “It’s not trivial by any measure, but they can get the job done,” Miller explains. Within some services, such as building applications, people were told to resubmit documents.

Staff within the council also hacked their way around not having their regular systems in place. Google Forms and Google Sheets were used as temporary measures to collect information from people. Council staff working in housing repairs have described putting “piles and piles” of repair requests from paper into computer systems. Where temporary systems were used, Miller says it has been important to work out how the newly collected data will fit back into permanent systems when they’re restored.

In some cases, Miller says, the council made its recovery harder by trying not to disrupt the services it provided. The team decided to continue paying its 30,000 benefits claims that were in place at the time of the attack. “It would have been administratively much easier to just stop all benefits payments, get the benefits system back up and running, and then start again,” Miller says. “But that would have been six months when people didn’t receive any benefits.”

Miller says the cyberattack has allowed Hackney to speed up the process of moving more of its services to the cloud, rather than hosting them directly on its own servers. He says the council is trying to remove risk from its systems, saying it got rid of 95 percent of Windows computers, which are more likely to suffer from malware. “We really had to build our data infrastructure from the ground up again,” Stidle, the Hackney data and insight manager, said in a July 2022 talk about [rebuilding the council’s services](#). “We wanted to migrate everything into the cloud and use that crisis as an opportunity.”

As of the start of 2023, the majority of council services are running normally again, Miller says, adding that Hackney’s teams are still sorting some data out and putting it back together. That doesn’t mean there aren’t still issues. The council’s register of risks, [as of January 18](#), ranks the aftermath of the cyberattack as a “red risk” but says its impact is decreasing. Ultimately, Miller says local governments and public sector organizations need to identify where the threats to their organizations are coming from and make sure to prioritize cybersecurity and otherwise cut out possible risks. “It matters to us what the impact is on our residents—and that’s what really kept people going,” he says.

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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	01/31 Pakistan: ‘security lapse’ for mosque blast
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-mosque-bombing-death-toll-rises-fdbc592dfd3b9a23ec2081b635d65b6e?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_06
GIST	<p>PESHAWAR, Pakistan (AP) — A suicide bombing that struck inside a mosque at a police and government compound in northwest Pakistan reflects “security lapses,” current and former officials said as the death toll from the devastating blast climbed to 100 on Tuesday.</p> <p>The blast, which ripped through a Sunni mosque inside a major police facility in the city of Peshawar, was one of the deadliest attacks on Pakistani security forces in recent years. It left as many as 225 wounded, some still in serious condition in hospital, according to Kashif Aftab Abbasi, a senior officer in Peshawar.</p> <p>More than 300 worshippers were praying in the mosque, with more approaching, when the bomber set off his explosives vest on Monday morning, officials said.</p> <p>The explosion blew off part of the roof, and what was left soon caved in, injuring many more, according to Zafar Khan, a police officer. Rescuers had to remove mounds of debris to reach worshippers still trapped under the rubble.</p> <p>More bodies were retrieved overnight and early Tuesday, according to Mohammad Asim, a government hospital spokesman in Peshawar, and several of those critically injured died. “Most of them were policemen,” Asim said of the victims.</p>

Bilal Faizi, the chief rescue official, said rescue teams were still working Tuesday at the site as more people are believed trapped inside. Mourners were burying the victim at different graveyards in the city and elsewhere.

Counter-terrorism police are investigating how the bomber was able to reach the mosque, which is in a walled compound, inside a high security zone with other government buildings.

“Yes, it was a security lapse,” said Ghulam Ali, the provincial governor in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, of which Peshawar is the capital.

Abbasi, the official who gave the latest casualty tolls, concurred. “There was a security lapse and the inspector-general of the police has set up an inquiry committee, which will look into all aspects of the bombing,” he said. “Action will be taken against those whose negligence” caused the attack.

Talat Masood, a retired army general and senior security analyst said Monday’s suicide bombing showed “negligence.”

“When we know that Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan is active, and when we know that they have threatened to carry out attacks, there should have been more security at the police compound in Peshawar,” he told The Associated Press on Tuesday, referring to a militant group also known as the Pakistani Taliban or TTP.

Kamran Bangash, a provincial secretary-general with opposition party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf called for an investigation and said Pakistan will continue to face political instability so long as the current government is in power.

“The current government of Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has failed to improve the economy and law and order situation, and it should resign to pave the way for snap parliamentary elections,” he said.

The military’s media wing declined an Associated Press interview request for the chief of army staff. Asim Munir, who took office in November, has yet to do any media appearances.

Sharif visited a hospital in Peshawar after the bombing and vowed “stern action” against those behind the attack. “The sheer scale of the human tragedy is unimaginable. This is no less than an attack on Pakistan,” he tweeted.

On Tuesday he dismissed criticism of his government and call for unity.

“Through their despicable actions, terrorists want to spread fear & paranoia among the masses & reverse our hard-earned gains against terrorism & militancy,” he tweeted. “My message to all political forces is one of unity against anti-Pakistan elements. We can fight our political fights later.”

Authorities have not determined who was behind the bombing. Shortly after the explosion, TTP commander Sarbakaf Mohmand claimed responsibility for the attack in a post on Twitter.

But hours later, TTP spokesperson Mohammad Khurasani distanced the group from the bombing, saying it was not its policy to target mosques, seminaries and religious places, adding that those taking part in such acts could face punitive action under TTP’s policy. His statement did not address why a TTP commander had claimed responsibility for the bombing.

Pakistan, which is mostly Sunni Muslim, has seen a surge in militant attacks since November, when the Pakistani Taliban ended a cease-fire with government forces, as the country was contending with unprecedented floods that killed 1,739 people, destroyed more than 2 million homes, and at one point submerged as much as a third of the country.

The Pakistani Taliban are the dominant militant group in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, and Peshawar has been the scene of frequent attacks. But the Islamic State in Khorasan Province, a regional affiliation of the Islamic State group and a rival of the Taliban, has also been behind deadly attacks in Pakistan in recent years. Overall, violence has increased since the Afghan Taliban seized power in neighboring Afghanistan in August 2021, as U.S. and NATO troops pulled out of the country after 20 years of war.

The TTP is separate from but a close ally of the Afghan Taliban. It has waged an insurgency in Pakistan in the past 15 years, seeking stricter enforcement of Islamic laws, the release of its members in government custody and a reduction in the Pakistani military presence in areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province it has long used as its base.

Earlier this month, the Pakistani Taliban claimed one of its members shot and killed two intelligence officers, including the director of the counterterrorism wing of the country's military-based spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence. Security officials said Monday the gunman was traced and killed in a shootout in the northwest, near the Afghan border. In 2014, a Pakistani Taliban faction attacked an army-run school in Peshawar and killed 154, mostly schoolchildren.

The Taliban-run Afghan Foreign Ministry said it was "saddened to learn that numerous people lost their lives" in Peshawar and condemned attacks on worshippers as contrary to the teachings of Islam.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who is on a visit to the Middle East, tweeted his condolences, saying the bombing in Peshawar was a "horrific attack."

"Terrorism for any reason at any place is indefensible," he said.

Pakistan is also contending with political and economic crises in the wake of the floods and a disputed election.

Condemnations also came from the Saudi Embassy in Islamabad, as well as the U.S. Embassy, which said that the "United States stands with Pakistan in condemning all forms of terrorism."

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the bombing "particularly abhorrent" for targeting a place of worship, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan also expressed his condolences, calling the bombing a "terrorist suicide attack."

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HEADLINE	01/30 Indonesia: terror convicts in vicious cycle
SOURCE	https://thedi diplomat.com/2023/01/indonesias-vicious-cycle-terrorist-convicts-making-a-comeback/
GIST	<p>One might argue that law enforcers need to succeed at all times, but for terrorists, all it takes is one successful attack. On December 7, Agus Sujatno (alias Abu Muslim) blew himself up at a police station in Bandung, West Java. The suicide bomber was reported to have been affiliated with Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and was previously released in 2021 after being convicted for his role in a terrorist attack plot in 2017. Cases of relapsed former terrorist convicts are in fact not uncommon in Indonesia. Between 2002 and 2020, at least 94 former convicts – or 11.39 percent of the total released – have returned to terrorism-related activities.</p> <p>More worrisome are the recidivists that were deported after attempting to join IS abroad, given the greater threat that they pose compared to non-combatant returnees. They might get frustrated that hijrah (migration) is no longer a viable option, while closer targets are more visible. Based on the Supreme Court's records, 15 out of 40 former returnee convicts relapsed by attempting to migrate for the second time (three cases) or plotting more terror attacks (12). And 11 terror plots were planned in West Java and North Sumatra targeting police stations, voting stations (TPS), and the offices of the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu).</p>

It is interesting to examine the vicious cycle of radicalization up until the point that it manifests as a terror attack. First, as in Agus' case, more than half of the aforementioned relapsed deportees took less than two years to get radicalized again. Furthermore, the digitalization of the Indonesian public sphere has allowed pro-IS communities to thrive on social media. This growing online network provides everything from propaganda and professional expertise (such as bomb-assembling guidelines) to opportunities to undertake hijrah. Online terrorist networks can also play a role as a safe haven for former convicts after their release from prison.

Second, when it comes to the motives behind the attacks, it seems that the government and counterterrorism (CT) observers have different opinions. The police linked Agus' motivation to the call to jihad by the new IS leader after the death of Abu Hasan al-Hasyimi back in October 2022. Meanwhile, observer Harits Abu Ulya questioned why, if the JAD was politically motivated, did it not take advantage of the G-20 event in Bali? It is possible that Agus saw the recently passed revised criminal code as taghut – an act of worship against Allah. It is also possible that he was driven by a desire for revenge against the police after they killed Agus' partner, Yahyat Cahdiyat, in the 2017 Cicendo Bombing plot.

Third, the chief of the Indonesian National Police, Listyo Sigit Prabowo, stated that during Agus' time in prison, he refused to take part in deradicalization program run by the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT). Agus was thus classified as uncooperative. This could be explained by the fact that other terrorists have described him as kafir – a non-believer who commits serious idolatry against Allah – for joining the program. One of the few other reasons is that terrorist convicts feel a greater pressure to maintain a good relationship with their counterparts, due to the fact that old networks usually support the convicts' families outside of prison.

It is also important to keep in mind that Agus spent his four-year sentence at the not-so-high-security Nusakambangan Prison in Central Java. The prison is known for being understaffed with overworked security guards. Without following any deradicalization program, Agus' beliefs might have been reinforced by his interactions with other terrorist inmates. And as Agus was released without parole, the already-overworked officers were unlikely to have monitored closely his reintegration into society.

It seems that the government has a lot on its plate in terms of evaluating the current counterterrorism measures. One way to start is to stop pointing fingers. For example, the head of BNPT, Boy Rafli Amar, stated that the authorities were not "caught off guard" and that they cannot "read the terrorists' minds." Irfan Idris, the director of BNPT's Deradicalization Program of BNPT, stated similarly that the process of reintegrating former terrorist convicts is not exclusively the government's domain. However, the people's participation in counterterrorism efforts is unlikely to have much impact if the systemic problem of Indonesia's deradicalization and disengagement programs is left unsolved.

The first concern is the lack of a legal basis for making the deradicalization and disengagement program mandatory for all terrorist convicts. As the programs are not part of the country's penal code, the authorities have no choice but to accept an inmate's refusal to participate. Another program that needs a legal basis is out-of-prison aftercare for inmates that have served full sentences. Unfortunately, only individuals on parole receive supervision from the government, including during the reintegration process.

The ineffectiveness of the deradicalization and disengagement programs can also be explained by the lack of coordination between relevant institutions. The "ego wars" are still prevalent between BNPT and the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, as prison authorities are reluctant to use BNPT's guidelines and methods in fostering terrorist inmates from the counterterrorism agency. A counterterrorism researcher at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Alif Satria, has argued that although the National Action Plan on Preventing Extremism has covered the establishment of a coordination forum, the reality on the ground shows that state and non-state stakeholders still coordinate on a case-by-case basis.

Deradicalization and disengagement programs should also be implemented in close coordination with crime and border control. With little to no room to fight with guns and bombs due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, terrorist groups have been refocusing themselves in rebuilding a stronger network by

infiltrating government institutions and raising funds. However, given that travel restrictions in Indonesia and its neighboring countries have been lifted, the option to undertake hijrah is back on the table.

Based on the travel history of the aforementioned 40 deportees, terrorists are able to pass the immigration system undetected by obtaining false travel documents. For example, terrorist convict Uzair Cholid managed to apply for a new identity card and passport without further background checks through a middleman who has access to a government data center, despite having been deported previously. Thus, dismantling the illicit market that provides false identities and travel documents is important, as the current method of rejecting terrorist convicts' passports and/or visa applications has proven to be insufficient.

Secondly, terrorists are aware of the departure points with the least security controls. With this knowledge, they would intentionally avoid Jakarta's busy Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, preferring to depart from airports in North Sumatra, East Java, Bali, or North Kalimantan.

The case of the 2019 Jolo Cathedral suicide bombing is an interesting example of "stealth" travel. Rullie Rian Zeke and his family took the sea route from Keningau (Malaysia) to Jolo (southern Philippines) with help from illegal channels. Furthermore, according to the Indonesian consulate in Davao City, the family's real identities were not recorded in the system, indicating that they managed to enter the Philippines with fake identities.

All in all, the high rate of recidivist terrorist convicts is a problem that should be taken seriously. Records of their profiles, plots, and successful attacks reflect the vulnerability of Indonesia's counterterrorism efforts at many levels, from crime control and immigration to deradicalization and disengagement. As a huge wave of terrorist mobility is expected following the end of the COVID-19 restrictions situation, the government needs to evaluate its counterterrorism measures as soon as possible.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Georgia charges 19: domestic terrorism
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/19-cop-city-activists-got-152500656.html
GIST	<p>A burst of gunfire rang through a forest on the edge of Atlanta, Georgia, on the morning of January 18. Manuel Esteban Paez Terán, whose chosen name was Tortuguita (Spanish for "little turtle"), had been shot and killed by police officers, becoming the only known person killed by law enforcement during an environmentalist act of land defense in the U.S.</p> <p>Tortuguita was part of a loose-knit group continuously occupying the woods to stop trees from being felled by construction of a sprawling police training center known to activists as Cop City. In 2021, with little public input, the Atlanta city council approved plans for the \$90 million Public Safety Training Center on the city-owned former site of Atlanta's prison farm, which the trees had reclaimed and had previously been included in plans for a revamped parks system. (The activists call the area the Weelaunee Forest, a name from the Muscogee people who were violently forced out of the area 200 years ago.) Although some members of the transient and leaderless group had damaged property in apparent attempts to stymie construction, many just camped, hoping their refusal to move out of the way of the trees would prevent them from being cut down and replaced by firing ranges and a mock city where police would conduct riot training.</p> <p>That morning, members of a multi-agency law enforcement task force had moved through the woods toward Tortuguita's tent. According to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Tortuguita fired first, using a handgun the 26-year-old had purchased, and struck a Georgia State Patrol officer, who was hospitalized. No civilians appear to have witnessed what happened, and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation says no body cameras captured the incident. In life, Tortuguita spoke often (and publicly) of the virtues of nonviolence, so their friends and fellow activists doubt the state's story.</p> <p>"We have no reason whatsoever to trust the narrative that's been given," said Kamau Franklin, founder of the local group Community Movement Builders, which organizes with Black communities in Atlanta and opposes the police training center, citing other high-profile police killings around the country in which official narratives have fallen apart.</p>

While the environmental nonprofit Global Witness has [documented over 1,700 killings](#) of land defenders worldwide over the past decade, Tortuguita's death is only the second such killing in the U.S. The first was a fisheries observer who [disappeared](#) at sea under circumstances that suggested foul play in 2015.

On Thursday, Governor Brian Kemp [declared a state of emergency](#) in response to protests Saturday night sparked by Tortuguita's death, during which participants threw rocks, broke windows, and burned a police car. Kemp's order, effective until February 9, allows up to 1,000 National Guard troops to police the streets of Atlanta.

To allies, Tortuguita's killing was the climax of an escalation of police and legal tactics meant to stifle the [wide-ranging](#) movement to stop construction of the training center, which includes parks advocates, prison abolitionists, and area neighborhood associations. Over the course of December and January, 19 opponents of the police training center have been charged with felonies under Georgia's rarely used 2017 domestic terrorism law. But Grist's review of [20 arrest warrants](#) shows that none of those arrested and slapped with terrorism charges are accused of seriously injuring anyone. Nine are alleged to have committed no specific illegal actions beyond misdemeanor trespassing. Instead, their mere association with a group committed to defending the forest appears to be the foundation for declaring them terrorists. Officials have underlined that an investigation is ongoing, and charges could yet be added or removed.

Lauren Regan, an attorney who is the executive director of the Civil Liberties Defense Center, which will represent some defendants, said the charges are legally flimsy and designed to scare movement supporters. "It's so next time a vigil happens, mom or the school teacher or the nurse — or someone that has higher risk of randomly getting arrested — is probably going to think twice about going," she said.

"They're going to use this to continually vilify and criminalize the wider movement," added Franklin. Georgia's terror law passed in response to high-profile mass shootings including the 2015 massacre of nine Black churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina, by white supremacist Dylann Roof. The 2017 law expanded the definition of "domestic terrorism" from its original designation as an act intended to kill or injure at least 10 people to one encompassing a range of property crimes. Critics at the time, including the Georgia chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, [argued](#) that the law was bound to be used against protesters and to stifle free speech. The charges validate civil liberties' groups concerns and offer a warning signal for lawmakers in both major parties who have [repeatedly](#) proposed federal domestic terrorism legislation as a solution to America's epidemic of mass murder.

Atlanta Police Department spokesperson John Chafee, on the other hand, defended the use of the law in this case. "We are hopeful the law and the possibility of being charged with this felony will be a deterrent from engaging in criminal behavior," he told Grist. "We support the right to protest and we will work to ensure those engaged in a lawful protest are able to do so safely."

Elsewhere in the woods on the day of the shooting, officers tore down 25 campsites and arrested seven activists. Law enforcement also netted bystanders: One Dekalb County Police Department incident report describes two individuals walking along a river trail "in an area that is being occupied by suspects wanted for domestic terrorism." The Georgia Bureau of Investigation recommended they be "placed in flex handcuffs and transported to the nearby command post." Later, they were determined to be "vagrants from the city of New Orleans" and were released.

Timothy Murphy was one of the last forest defenders standing. In the predawn hours of January 19, S.W.A.T. team members shone spotlights on Murphy as the activist perched above a treehouse, according to an incident report. Around sunrise, Murphy rappelled down the tree. Dekalb County Police S.W.A.T. members grabbed their legs, cut their harness, and booked them on charges of domestic terrorism.

So far police don't claim that Murphy committed any act of violence or even property destruction. Key to Murphy's terror charge, according to their arrest [warrant](#), is that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or DHS, designated a group called Defend the Atlanta Forest as "Domestic Violent Extremists."

In other words, Murphy appears to have been charged with terrorism on the basis of their affiliation with the forest defenders.

In response to questions from Grist, a DHS spokesperson denied that the federal agency classifies any specific groups with this term, while also saying that it does use the term to refer to any U.S. individual or group “who seeks to further social or political goals, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence” and regularly shares information about threats with state and local agencies.

Regardless, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation decided that Murphy was a member of the “extremist” group on the basis of the activist’s actions: They trespassed and then refused police orders to leave the treehouse for 12 hours. As a result, if prosecutors move forward with the terror charge, Murphy will face a mandatory minimum sentence of five to 35 years in prison for what’s known as a tree sit — a common tactic among environmentalists.

The [Atlanta forest defenders’ warrants](#) state that Defend the Atlanta Forest earned its Domestic Violent Extremist label because members had thrown Molotov cocktails, rocks, and fireworks at police, and also shot metal ball bearings at contractors. They had also committed various acts of property destruction, including vandalism, discharging firearms at “critical infrastructure,” and committing arson of “public buildings, heavy equipment, private buildings, and private vehicles.”

However, besides three allegations of rock-throwing, the [14 forest defenders’ warrants](#) do not appear to accuse them of committing any of the above acts that led to the designation. Grist’s analysis of [arrest warrants](#) found that, for nine forest defenders detained during police operations in December and January, their alleged acts of “domestic terrorism” consist solely of trespassing in the woods and camping or occupying a tree house.

A [warrant](#) following a police raid on December 13, for example, justifies a domestic terrorism charge by stating that the activist “affirmed their cooperation with [Defend the Atlanta Forest] by occupying a tree house while wearing a gas mask and camouflage clothing.” Another defendant, arrested January 18, told police that they were aware of the Cop City controversy before coming to Atlanta and had planned in advance to sleep on the land — an admission that apparently became the basis for a domestic terrorism charge. “Said defendant admitted to participating in previous protests in other states for environmental causes,” the warrant added.

Four forest defenders charged with domestic terrorism are also accused of possessing incendiary devices or firearms or throwing rocks at fire department and emergency workers and damaging a police vehicle. One of those was charged separately with injuring an officer, who scraped and cut his knee and elbow as the defendant fled. A fifth defendant is separately accused of trying to cut the rope of an arborist attempting to remove them from a tree house.

Six people charged with domestic terrorism during a night of protest in response to Tortugueta’s killing on January 21, including one who was also charged in the woods, face a slightly different set of allegations.

Their domestic terrorism arrest affidavits point to felony charges they face for allegedly damaging a nearby Atlanta Police Foundation building and setting fire to a police car. A separate set of arrest citations is ambiguous as to whether the defendants are known to have personally carried out property damage, though one defendant is charged with carrying spray paint, a hammer, torch fuel, and a lighter as well as kicking and spitting on an officer as they were arrested.

The initial arrest citations for domestic terrorism also state that members of the crowd “used explosives/fireworks toward police,” without indicating whether the defendants did so themselves. The street protesters’ domestic terrorism arrest affidavits state that the alleged felonies were carried out with the intention of intimidating officials into changing government policy.

All but one of the activists arrested in the forest were released on bonds ranging from \$6,000 to \$13,500. None of the street protesters have been released, with four dubbed flight risks and denied bond, and two unable to pay a \$355,000 bond.

The forest defenders' charges appear to stand on shaky legal ground. To be convicted under Georgia's terror law, an individual must first commit or attempt a felony. Nine of those arrested in the forest are charged with criminal trespass, which is only a misdemeanor.

Also, the acts must be intended to intimidate people, use intimidation to influence government policy, or impact the government through the use of "destructive devices, assassination, or kidnapping." How trespassing and camping could constitute intimidation is unclear. The law does not contain language about whether associating with a "Domestic Violent Extremist" group counts as terrorism.

Even if the charges are dismissed on the grounds that they do not fulfill the requirements of the law, they may leave a lasting legacy. "One of the problems with state repression is the crackdown and the arrests and the jailing and the bond — for the humans that are targeted, even if they end up being acquitted, all of that takes a toll," said Regan, the attorney.

Although [multiple](#) environmental activists have been [prosecuted](#) under federal terrorism law in recent years, it's been over a decade since the U.S. has seen anti-terrorism charges aimed at a broad swath of environmental activists. During a period known as the "[Green Scare](#)" in the mid-2000s, more than a dozen people associated with the Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front were arrested as part of an FBI domestic terror operation. At the time, "eco-terrorism" became the Justice Department's [top domestic terrorism priority](#), despite the fact that those arrested had made a point to avoid causing any bodily harm even as they burned down facilities they considered environmentally destructive.

The smaller-scale green scare that police have carried out in Atlanta in recent weeks is in some ways even more indiscriminate, since many of the alleged terrorists are not even accused of property damage.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Jury convicts Michigan ISIS jihadist
SOURCE	https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/wayne-county/2023/01/30/dearborn-isis-soldier-ibraheem-musaibli-guilty-in-terror-case/69856301007/
GIST	<p><i>Detroit</i> — An Islamic State soldier from Dearborn captured on a Syrian battlefield five years ago faces at least 10 years in federal prison after a jury Monday convicted him of providing material support to a terrorist group.</p> <p>Jurors spent about four hours deliberating after a nine-day trial before convicting Ibraheem Musaibli, 32, of all three charges against him. That includes two terrorism-related charges, which include conspiring to provide material support, and a third charge of receiving military-type training from ISIS. The two terrorism-related charges could send Musaibli to prison for 50 years while the training charge carries a mandatory sentence of 10 years.</p> <p>The verdict is the latest development in an international ordeal involving a rare ISIS fighter brought back to America in 2018 to face charges. Musaibli's trial started Jan. 19.</p> <p>"Ibraheem Musaibli traveled halfway around the world and joined a vicious, brutal and violent terrorist organization known — and proud of — its barbaric acts of terror," U.S. Attorney Dawn Ison said in a statement.</p> <p>Musaibli's lawyer, John Shea, declined to comment.</p> <p>Musaibli's case has shed light on the Michigan man's journey from his parents' perfume shop in Detroit to a Middle East war zone and presented the U.S. court system with a unique chance to prosecute an American accused of leaving the U.S. and fighting for the Islamic State group.</p>

	<p>Prosecutors had described Musaibli, who was born in Detroit, as a homegrown jihadist who served in a brigade of foreign fighters. Defense lawyers had argued Musaibli was not a soldier, was driven overseas by a curiosity about life in a territory governed by a strict view of Muslim law and was branded a spy and repeatedly thrown in an ISIS jail.</p> <p>The trial involved unique allegations involving an American accused of becoming radicalized in the U.S. and successfully traveling to ISIS-controlled territory, said Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University.</p> <p>"The vast majority of people arrested for ISIS-related crimes never got outside of the U.S. and joined ISIS," Hughes told The Detroit News.</p> <p>Musaibli's path overseas started in 2015 when he traveled to Yemen before sneaking into Syria, joining ISIS and spending more than 2 ½ years in the Islamic State fighting for the group, swearing allegiance, recruiting others and spreading propaganda, prosecutors said.</p> <p>The government's evidence includes video of Musaibli talking about his participation in jihad and a trove of text and social media messages from Musaibli to relatives on Facebook and WhatsApp.</p> <p>The trial had faced delays due to battles over evidence, COVID-19 and international complications associated with finding witnesses in a war-torn country.</p> <p>The trial started almost five years after Musaibli was captured in Syria and flown back to the U.S. aboard a C-17 military airplane customized so FBI agents could interrogate him and an Indiana woman convicted of financing terrorism.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Somalia jails IS branch leader's wife
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/wife-of-islamic-state-somalia-branch-leader-sentenced-to-eight-years-in-jail/ar-AA16TY8K
GIST	<p>A Somali military court has sentenced the wife of the leader of the Islamic State's branch in the country, Abdukadir Mumim, to eight years in prison for belonging to the jihadist group and financing its terrorist activities.</p> <p>The woman, identified as Fartun Abdirashid Husein, was arrested in March 2022 during an operation in the capital Mogadishu, as reported by the Somali news agency SONNA.</p> <p>The Somali branch of Islamic State emerged in October 2015 after a group of Al Shabaab militiamen splintered from the group and focuses its operations in Puntland. Despite Mumin pledging allegiance to then Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the latter neither responded nor appointed him as the person in charge of the extremist formation's branch in the country.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/31 Burkina Faso beset w/multiple jihadi attacks
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-al-qaida-politics-burkina-faso-83827dc7f835508999ef041abce2241d
GIST	<p>OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (AP) — Multiple jihadi attacks across Burkina Faso over several days have resulted in the death of at least 32 people, including soldiers and civilians, government authorities said Tuesday.</p> <p>Burkina Faso's State Information Agency posted on its Facebook page that a dozen soldiers and a civilian were killed Monday in Falagountou in Burkina Faso's Sahel region during clashes between the military and jihadis. Another 20 people were killed in two attacks over the weekend in the country's east-central and western regions.</p>

Four people were executed Saturday afternoon when gunmen intercepted their van between Tenkodogo and Ouargaye villages. On Sunday, a passenger mini-bus coming from the western city of Banfora was intercepted by armed men, said Col. Jean Charles dit Yenapono Some, governor of the Cascades region in a statement. Eight women and one man were freed, the rest of the people were abducted and their lifeless bodies were found with bullet holes the following day, he said.

Jihadi violence linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State Group has ravaged the West African country for years killing thousands and displacing nearly 2 million people. Nearly 5,000 civilians have been killed since 2015, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).

The violence has sowed frustration and distrust among the population and led to two coups last year. The new junta leader, Ibrahim Traore, seized power in September promising to stem the violence but attacks are increasing.

Traore has mobilized tens of thousands of civilian fighters to combat the jihadis alongside the army. But analysts says the civilian fighters are accused of targeting other civilians perceived to be working with the jihadis, which is fueling retaliatory attacks.

“The types of mass-atrocities that are occurring were expected, as the conflict was expected to escalate in the coming months due to the increased mobilization of the population through the (volunteer) program and the increasing trend of extrajudicial killings by defence and security forces observed in recent months,” said Heni Nsaibia, senior researcher at ACLED.

“With the increase in state violence and state-sanctioned violence, it is not surprising that militant violence is escalating and further fueling cycles of attacks and retaliation,” he said.

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HEADLINE	01/30 TSA security directive to airports, carriers
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/no-fly-list-breach-tsa-domestic-airlines-warning/
GIST	<p>The Transportation Security Administration has issued a security directive to all U.S. airports and air carriers warning them about the need for more stringent cybersecurity protections following last week’s revelation that the federal “no-fly” list had been leaked.</p> <p>Outrage has grown since a Swiss national published a blog post earlier this month explaining that a copy of the “no-fly” list from 2019 was left exposed on an unsecured server, alongside other sensitive data from CommuteAir, a regional airline under United Airlines.</p> <p>A TSA spokesperson told The Record that the agency is still investigating the incident but has reached out to all domestic airlines to warn them about the prospect of further breaches.</p> <p>The security directive, issued Friday, “reinforces existing requirements on handling sensitive security information and personally identifiable information,” the spokesperson said.</p> <p>The agency ordered the carriers to review their systems and take immediate action to ensure files were protected.</p> <p>“We will continue to work with partners to ensure that they implement security requirements to safeguard systems and networks from cyberattacks,” the spokesperson said.</p> <p>TSA added that CommuteAir notified the government of the breach on January 18 and reiterated that none of the agency’s systems were affected.</p> <p>The spokesperson noted that other federal agencies are working alongside TSA to investigate the issue.</p>

In its [incident report](#) to Maine’s attorney general office, CommuteAir noted that 1,473 people were affected. The airline previously told The Record that employee information also was leaked in the breach.

Researchers last week dug up a November dark web post from the Endurance ransomware group that claimed a database of employee information had been stolen from the company.

A CommuteAir spokesperson did not respond to questions about the ransomware attack but said there is “no evidence to support these two events are connected.”

In their letter to victims of both data breaches, the company said it is working with Mandiant to modernize their systems and investigate the incidents. They noted that the breaches were also reported to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).

Rep. Dan Bishop (R-NC) expressed outrage at the leak of the list and said Congress [would launch its own investigation into the incident](#).

Bishop and Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Mark Green (R-TN) [sent a letter](#) to TSA Administrator David Pekoske on Thursday demanding answers about how the hacker was able to access versions of the Federal Terrorist Screening Dataset, as well as a version of the “no-fly” list.

Green and Bishop noted that the hacker behind the incident told The Record that it may have been possible for them to exploit their access to the server in order to cancel or delay flights, and even switch out crew members.

“If this were to be the case, the national security implications of this are alarming. As you are keenly aware, the transportation systems sector is one of 16 critical infrastructure sectors in the United States, ensuring the free movement of people and goods essential to the American economy and way of life,” they wrote.

“The notion that such a consequential database be left unsecure is a matter concerning cybersecurity, aviation security, as well as civil rights and liberties.”

The letter included 10 questions about the breach and demanded answers from TSA by February 8.

The White House has organized meetings with aviation industry leaders in recent months as it seeks to bolster cybersecurity protections in key sectors. Another congressman has called for federal agencies to investigate cybersecurity vulnerabilities in all systems underpinning air travel.

A recent report found that there were 62 ransomware attacks on global aviation stakeholders in 2020 alone, and the value of ransom demands broke records in 2021.

The European Air Traffic Management Computer Emergency Response Team (EATM-CERT) found the number of reported cyberattacks among airline industry organizations grew 530% from 2019 to 2020. The organization has tracked dozens of attacks against airports and airlines over the last six months.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Pakistan mosque bombing death toll rises
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/30/pakistan-mosque-explosion-kills-worshippers-peshawar
GIST	<p>At least 83 people have been killed and many more injured in a suicide bombing carried out at a mosque in the city of Peshawar, as the security situation in the country continues to deteriorate.</p> <p>The blast struck as 300 worshippers were praying in the mosque, located in the Police Lines area of the Peshawar, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where the city’s police headquarters and counter-terrorism officers are based. The death toll rose to 83 after the recovery of more bodies from the site, a spokesperson from Lady Reading Hospital in Peshawar said. Police said at least 27 of the dead were police officials.</p>

The impact of the explosion collapsed the roof and one wall of the mosque and injured many people, said Zafar Khan, a local police officer.

Witnesses said the blast took place in the main hall just as afternoon prayers were about to begin and worshippers were packed tightly inside. According to officials, the bomber had been standing in the front row.

A commander for the Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), took responsibility for the attack, claiming it was revenge for a fighter killed in Afghanistan last year.

But hours later, a TTP spokesperson distanced the group from the bombing, saying it was not its policy to target mosques, seminaries and religious places. His statement did not address the previous claim of responsibility.

The TTP, which is believed to be close to al-Qaida, has waged an insurgency in Pakistan for the past 15 years, fighting for stricter enforcement of Islamic laws and the release of jailed members, and has been responsible for multiple deadly attacks in the past.

The group has recently intensified its militancy after a ceasefire with the government broke down in November. It has claimed responsibility for almost a dozen attacks in recent months, mostly targeting military and police in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province which borders Afghanistan.

Rescuers at the blast scene scrambled to pull worshippers out from beneath heavy debris from the fallen roof, with at least 20 thought to still be trapped as night fell. Khan said several of the wounded were in a critical condition at a hospital and there were fears the death toll would rise.

Khan said between 300 and 400 police officers were in the area when the blast took place and the bomber had breached multiple layers of security to enter the mosque. "It is apparent that a security lapse occurred," he told reporters.

Meena Gul, a police officer, said he was inside the mosque when the bomb went off and could hear cries and screams after the explosion.

The Pakistani prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif, called it a "suicide attack" and ordered authorities to ensure the best possible medical treatment to the survivors.

"Terrorists want to create fear by targeting those who perform the duty of defending Pakistan," he said in a statement. After visiting the scene, Sharif said the bombing was "no less than an attack on Pakistan".

The former prime minister Imran Khan said better intelligence gathering and security for police forces was needed to "combat the growing threat of terrorism".

Though the TTP is a separate entity from the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Taliban's ascension to power in Kabul has been seen to empower the group in neighbouring Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In January, a group of Pakistan Taliban militants attacked a police station in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and in December dozens of TTP detainees overpowered their guards at a counter-terrorism centre in the Bannu district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, took hostages and seized control of the facility for more than 24 hours.

Peshawar, the embattled capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has been the target of frequent militant attacks and suicide bombings, most recently in March 2022 when 56 worshippers were killed in a blast at a Shia mosque in the city, with Islamic State claiming responsibility.

Following the bombing, security was beefed up in other big cities including Islamabad, where security at all entry and exit points of the capital city was increased and snipers were deployed at "important points and buildings".

HEADLINE	01/30 UN decries Taliban ban women aid workers
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/taliban-ban-women-aid-workers-potential-death-blow-96776077
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS -- The U.N. humanitarian chief warned Monday that the Taliban's ban on women aid workers in Afghanistan is “a potential death blow” to many important humanitarian programs.</p> <p>If the Taliban don’t make exceptions to their edict “this would be catastrophic,” Martin Griffiths said at a news conference.</p> <p>He said a delegation including international aid groups made the case that Afghan women are critical to humanitarian operations during meetings last week with nine Taliban officials, including Afghanistan's foreign affairs and economy ministers.</p> <p>“We were asked to be patient,” Griffiths said. “We were told that guidelines are being developed by the Taliban authorities which would provide, allegedly, the functioning of women in humanitarian operations.”</p> <p>He said the Taliban's consistent message “that there will be a place for women working” was “a slightly patronizing message, but it’s an important one.”</p> <p>Griffiths noted that after the Dec. 24 edict by the Taliban barring aid groups from employing Afghan women, the health minister granted an exception for women in the health field and the education minister granted an exception for those involved in primary education.</p> <p>He said the humanitarian delegation told the Taliban that if they weren’t going to rescind the edict “then we must expand these exceptions to cover all the aspects of humanitarian action.”</p> <p>Griffiths, who is the U.N. undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, wouldn’t speculate on what will happen.</p> <p>“Let’s see if these guidelines do come through. Let’s see if they are beneficial. Let’s see what space there is for the essential and central role of women in our humanitarian operations,” he said.</p> <p>Despite initial promises, the Taliban have imposed increasing restrictions on girls and women since they took power in August 2021 during the final weeks of the U.S. and NATO forces’ pullout after 20 years. Their takeover drove millions into poverty and hunger after foreign aid stopped almost overnight.</p> <p>Omar Abdi, deputy executive director for programming for the U.N. children’s agency UNICEF who was part of the delegation, said 6 million Afghans face emergency levels of food insecurity and are one step away from famine. He said 875,000 children are expected to suffer severe acute malnutrition this year, which is why “it’s critical to continue these operations.”</p> <p>Abdi cited some positive signs. He said that despite the Taliban ban on girls attending secondary school, an estimated 200,000 girls continue to receive secondary education in around 12 provinces. He added that female secondary school teachers continue to receive their salaries from the Taliban authorities.</p> <p>He said Taliban officials reaffirmed to the delegation “that they are not against girls learning in secondary schools, and again promised to reopen once the guidelines are approved by their leader.”</p> <p>“In addition, over the last year the number of community-based education classes taking place in private homes, public places has doubled, from 10,000 to 20,000 classes,” he said. “These serve about 600,000 children, of whom 55% are girls.”</p>

	<p>Abdi said these positive signs are the result of both the commitment from Taliban authorities and pressure from local communities to keep schools and community schools open.</p> <p>“Without education,” he said, “certainly there is no hope for a better future for girls and women of Afghanistan.”</p> <p>Sofia Sprechmann Sineiro, CARE International's secretary-general, said that “tying the hands of NGOs by barring women from giving life-saving support to other women will cost lives.”</p> <p>Janti Soeripto, president of Save the Children US, said women account for 30% of the 55,000 Afghan nationals working for NGOs and many of them are the sole breadwinners for their families.</p> <p>Without them, she said, aid can’t be delivered to millions of women and children, and “if the ban isn’t reversed, the consequences for the people of Afghanistan will be dire.”</p> <p>So far, Griffiths said, women working for the U.N. and its agencies haven’t been banned and continue to work, but he insisted that Afghan women must also be allowed to contribute to the country’s economy.</p> <p>“Afghanistan is going through a savage winter, the second under the Taliban,” he said. “Last winter, we managed to survive. I don’t know if we can do this indefinitely, not with all these bans.”</p> <p>He said 28 million Afghans need help and the \$4.6 billion needed for humanitarian aid for the country this year is the largest amount in the world.</p> <p>“Every day that goes by without proper, functioning humanitarian aid is not a good day for the people of Afghanistan,” Griffiths said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Pakistani Taliban’s deadly insurgency
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/pakistani-talibans-deadly-insurgency-96767917
GIST	<p>ISLAMABAD -- When a suicide bomber struck a mosque inside a police compound in the northwestern city of Peshawar on Monday, suspicion immediately fell on the Pakistani Taliban, also known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP.</p> <p>In a post on Twitter, a commander for the group, Sarbakaf Mohmand, claimed responsibility for one of the deadliest attacks on security forces in recent months.</p> <p>But more than 10 hours later, TTP spokesperson Mohammad Khurasani distanced the group from the bombing, saying it was not its policy to target mosques or other religious sites, adding that those taking part in such acts could face punitive action under TTP’s policy. His statement did not address why a TTP commander had claimed responsibility for the bombing.</p> <p>The TTP’s denial also came after the Afghan Foreign Ministry condemned attacks on worshippers as contrary to the teachings of Islam.</p> <p>Relations already are strained between Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers, who are sheltering the TTP leadership and fighters.</p> <p>A look at the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, which has waged an insurgency in the country for 15 years:</p> <p>WHY IS THE TTP FIGHTING AN INSURGENCY?</p> <p>Angered by Pakistan’s cooperation with Washington in the war on terrorism, the TTP was officially set up by Pakistani militants in 2007 when different outlawed groups agreed to work together against Pakistan and support the Afghan Taliban, who were fighting U.S. and NATO forces.</p>

The TTP seeks stricter enforcement of Islamic laws, the release of its members in government custody, and a reduction in Pakistani military presence in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the province bordering Afghanistan that it has long used as a base.

The TTP has stepped up attacks on Pakistani soldiers and police since November, when it unilaterally ended a cease-fire with the government after the failure of months of talks, hosted by Afghanistan's Taliban rulers in Kabul. The TTP has repeatedly warned police not to take part in operations against its fighters in Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TTP AND THE AFGHAN TALIBAN?

The TTP is separate from but a close ally of the Afghan Taliban, and that group's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 emboldened the TTP, which shares the group's ideology.

TTP fighters used to hide in Pakistan's tribal northwest and also had sanctuary in Afghanistan, but they mostly lived a fugitive existence.

However, the Afghan Taliban started openly sheltering the TTP when they came to power. The Afghan Taliban also released TTP leaders and fighters who had been arrested by previous administrations in Kabul.

The Taliban have repeatedly said they will not allow anyone, including the TTP, to use Afghan soil for attacks against any country, including Pakistan. But Pakistani officials say there is a disconnect between the words and actions of the Afghan Taliban, who could stop the TTP from launching attacks inside the country but are failing to do so.

The Pakistani Taliban have expressed their allegiance to the head of the Afghan Taliban, said Abdullah Khan, a senior defense analyst and managing director of the Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies.

He added, however, that they have their own agenda and strategy.

TTP's operations have largely been aimed at targeting Pakistani forces, similar to the Afghan Taliban's agenda of ousting foreign forces from the country.

Khan fears that Pakistan will see a surge in militant violence in the coming weeks and months.

HAS VIOLENCE INCREASED RECENTLY?

Pakistan has seen innumerable militant attacks in the past two decades, but there has been an uptick since November, when the TTP ended a cease-fire with the government that had lasted for months.

The Pakistani Taliban regularly carry out shootings or bombings, especially in the rugged and remote northwestern Pakistan, a former TTP stronghold.

The violence has raised fears among residents of a possible military operation in the former tribal regions of North and South Waziristan, now two districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Hours after Monday's mosque bombing, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah Khan told the independent Geo news channel that Afghan Taliban rulers must stand by their commitment to the international community to not allow anyone to use their soil for attacks against another country.

"They should honor their promises," he said.

Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/30 Southwest 'valley fever' spreading
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/valley-fever-historically-found-only-southwest-spreading-can-devastati-rcna64313
GIST	<p>Doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong with Devin Buckley.</p> <p>It was February 2018, and the previously healthy 18-year-old found that he couldn't walk to the bathroom without becoming winded. That was in addition to the rapid weight loss, stomach problems and extreme fatigue that seemed to come out of nowhere.</p> <p>The campus health center at the University of Arizona in Tucson, where Buckley was enrolled as a freshman, had no answers. Neither did anyone at urgent care.</p> <p>Buckley was home in Chicago for spring break when he wound up in the intensive care unit, struggling to breathe. It was there that he was finally diagnosed with Valley fever, after a family friend suggested the doctors test for it.</p> <p>"It blew my mind that something so serious could be not known," Buckley, 24, said. "When I first got diagnosed, the word cancer was going around with some of the doctors — like they were screening me for that. So it just goes to show you how serious of a disease it is if doctors seeing it think the first thing I have is cancer."</p> <p>Valley fever is an infection caused by breathing in spores of the fungus <i>coccidioides</i>. The spores can survive through heat and drought, lingering in the soil. When the dirt is disturbed — through construction, wind or even walking — the spores can be lofted into the air.</p> <p>The fungus is endemic to the hot, dry soils of the Southwest; 97% of all U.S. cases of Valley fever are reported in Arizona and California, according to the California Department of Public Health.</p> <p>But that could change: Fungal infections, including Valley fever, are increasingly being diagnosed outside of their usual ranges. One study in the journal GeoHealth projected that, due to climate change, the range of Valley fever could spread east, through the Great Plains and north, to the Canadian border, before the end of the century.</p> <p>"As the temperatures warm up, and the western half of the U.S. stays quite dry, our desert-like soils will kind of expand and these drier conditions could allow <i>coccidioides</i> to live in new places," said Morgan Gorris, who led the GeoHealth study while at the University of California, Irvine, and is now a staff scientist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory.</p> <p>A 'tremendous spectrum' of disease</p> <p>Around 20,000 cases of Valley fever were reported in 2019, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says this is likely an underestimate. While easily diagnosed with a blood test, Valley fever has long been misdiagnosed or underdiagnosed due to lack of knowledge about the disease by both the public and physicians.</p> <p>The majority of people with Valley fever may never know they have it. Its symptoms often look similar to a respiratory virus infection: fatigue, cough, fever, shortness of breath and muscle aches.</p> <p>"If you see a patient with pneumonia, that either lives in the Southwest or has traveled to the Southwest, then Valley fever needs to be in what we call the differential diagnosis, meaning it's one of the things that we have to think about," said Dr. Royce Johnson, the medical director of the Valley Fever Institute at Kern Medical in Bakersfield, California.</p>

In 5% to 10% of cases, the infection can lead to serious, long-term problems in the lungs, according to the CDC.

“It definitely has a tremendous spectrum. You know, it ranges from people who breathe in the spores really have no symptoms but develop immunity,” said Dr. George Thompson, an infectious disease specialist at the University of California, Davis. “The other end of the spectrum is people with fulminant infection, [meningitis](#), or multisite dissemination, that is, it’s outside of lungs in multiple different sites in the body.” Fulminant infection means the illness comes on rapidly and severely in an otherwise healthy person.

“The vast majority are somewhere in between, but they still have a subacute illness,” he said. “They’re sick for weeks to months, you know, with cough, fatigue, fever, chills. So it’s still a significant disease.”

Valley fever can be difficult to treat; some patients need to take antifungal medications for months or years, which can come with uncomfortable side effects such as hair loss, chapped lips and dry skin.

In the years after Buckley was diagnosed, the disease spread from his lungs to his spine and legs. He’s been placed on a [ventilator](#) three times. The last time, in 2021, was the longest — he stayed on the ventilator for two weeks.

“The ventilator was on 100% at one point. It was breathing for me,” he said. “They were telling my mom, prepare for me not to be here.”

Buckley has relearned how to walk, feed himself and accomplish basic daily tasks, but he’s still not out of the woods. His life is radically different from what it was like before he got sick, filled with doctor’s appointments, surgeries and hospital stays.

Hope on the horizon

Scientists have been trying to develop a vaccine for Valley fever since the 1960s, according to the CDC. In the 1980s, one candidate was eventually tested in humans, but it didn’t work well.

But in recent years, researchers at the University of Arizona College of Medicine in Tucson have developed a vaccine that’s highly effective in dogs. Dogs, like humans, are susceptible to Valley fever. The two-dose vaccine uses a version of the *coccidioides* fungus that’s genetically tweaked so it can’t cause disease, but can still train the immune system to recognize and respond to future infections.

The vaccine could be approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for use in dogs by early 2024. If so, it would be the first time the U.S. has approved a vaccine to protect against a fungal infection in animals or humans.

Dr. John Galgiani, director of the Valley Fever Center for Excellence at the University of Arizona College of Medicine, worked on the vaccine research in dogs. He’s now focused on getting the vaccine into clinical trials for humans.

“I’m really quite hopeful,” he said. “In my view, right now, we do have a candidate that deserves to be evaluated and I think will probably be effective, and we’ll be using it.”

Still, an approved Valley fever vaccine for humans is years away. If all goes according to plan — which doesn’t always happen in the scientific process, Galgiani noted — the earliest he sees this vaccine available for humans is eight years.

But experts say now is the time to build on the momentum of the research to move vaccine development forward, before Valley fever reaches even more people in the country.

	“I think fungi are really the coming superbugs. I think they’re really the ones that are going to be problematic over the next decade. And Valley fever is going to be a key part of that,” said Thompson of UC Davis. “They are really here to stay. This battle is sort of just beginning.”
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HEADLINE	01/30 King tides stark outlook rising sea levels
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3795945/king-tides-paint-stark-outlook-into-rising-puget-sound-sea-levels/
GIST	<p>This past month has been a rough one for coastal flooding in cities up and down Washington’s coastline as king tides portend the future of rising sea levels’ impacts on the Puget Sound.</p> <p>According to a study done by the Washington State Department of Ecology (DOE), state experts studying sea level rise are learning from these events to help coastal communities plan for the future.</p> <p>King tides are extremely high tides caused by the gravitational pull between the Earth and the moon when the position of the sun and the moon creates the most pull on water.</p> <p>In December 2022, king tides contributed to coastal flooding after they coincided with a strong, rainy winter storm, low barometric pressure, and prevailing onshore winds.</p> <p>Sea levels in Seattle have already risen eight inches over the past century, and this trend is expected to continue. Sea level rise will increase the severity of existing coastal hazards, such as shoreline and coastal bluff erosion, storm surge, flooding, and saltwater intrusion.</p> <p>“The king tides of today will be our everyday high tides in the future,” the press release said.</p> <p>According to DOE, more than 14,000 homes and buildings, valued at more than \$8 billion, will be exposed to coastal flooding by 2050, with an estimated 12 to 34 inches of sea level rise expected.</p> <p>Working with the Washington Sea Grant, a program with the University of Washington climate conservation publication, along with other partners, the DOE is working to develop a coastal hazard response system to handle these rising sea levels better.</p> <p>The most recent project put together by the group is the Washington Coastal Resilience Project, a three-year program that aims to develop data projections to give estimates of what Washington’s coastlines will look like for the next 150 years.</p> <p>These projects have already helped to produce tangible changes in these communities, including Bellingham’s plan to redevelop 237 acres of waterfront property, new floodplain regulations in King County, and Gig Harbor raising its historic net sheds to preserve them better.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Iraq wetlands environmental calamity
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/29/death-in-the-marshes-environmental-calamity-hits-iraqs-unique-wetlands
GIST	<p>Small gangs of buffaloes sat submerged in green and muddy waters. Their back ridges rose over the surface like a chain of black islets, spanning the Toos River, a tributary of the Tigris that flows into the Huwaiza marshes in southern Iraq.</p> <p>With their melancholic eyes, they gazed with defiance at an approaching boat, refusing to budge. Only when the boatman shrieked “heyy, heyy, heyy” did one or two reluctantly raise their haunches. Towering over the boat, they moved a few steps away, giving the boatmen barely enough space to steer between a cluster of large, curved horns.</p>

On the right bank of the river stood a cultural centre built in the traditional style of southern Iraq, with tall arches made of thick bundles of reed tied together. It catered to a large number of Iraqi tourists and a handful of foreigners who have flocked to visit the marshland region since it was named a Unesco world heritage site in 2016.

A couple of hundred metres past the cultural centre, however, the engine of the boat sputtered, and its bottom scrapped against the mud as the river dwindled into a shallow swamp, where small herons and grebes stood in water barely reaching halfway up their stick-like legs.

The foliage on the two banks also disappeared, revealing a devastating scene: what two years earlier was a great expanse of blue water, a lagoon teeming with wildlife, fish, and home to large herds of water buffaloes, had turned into a flat desert where a few thorny shrubs sprouted.

Under the scorching sun, the hot wind kicked tumbleweed across parched yellow earth, scarred with deep cracks and crumbling into thin dust under the feet. Rising above the ground were mounds of dead reed beds upon which the marsh dwellers had built their homes. A few relics of their former life lay scattered around: broken plastic buckets, some rusting metal pipe, and a kettle.

The ruin of nearly 3,000 sq km (1,000 sq miles) of this unique ecosystem is a small example of the unprecedented environmental disaster unfolding in Iraq. Rivers and lakes that had spawned farming communities since the dawn of civilisation are drying up, the country's water reserves reduced by half, while the Iraqi ministry of water resources estimates that one-quarter of Iraq's fresh water will be lost in the next decade.

In the province of Mosul and surrounding areas, considered Iraq's bread basket, two consecutive drought seasons have turned large swaths of wheat and barley fields into arid lands, leading to the loss of nearly 90% of the most recent harvest. Officials believe that will continue to the next season.

After canals and rivers went dry, farmers began digging boreholes, but the unregulated use of underground water is causing a severe drop in the quality and water levels. In the southern region of Samawa, the illegal digging of boreholes has led to the total disappearance of Lake Sawa.

Meanwhile, freak sandstorms battering cities and eroding the soil have become a recurrent event owing to the drought and loss of vegetation coverage – 40,000 hectares (100,000 acres) are lost to desertification each year.

The drought is leading to the displacement of tens of thousands of people, pushing farmers to abandon their lands and move into the margins of big cities, settling in shanties on their outskirts, straining an already crumbling infrastructure and causing further destruction of agricultural lands and desertification. And in a country with a fragile security situation, rife with heavily armed militias and awash with an abundance of weapons, the competition over water, and the unregulated digging of boreholes, is creating local feuds that threaten to spill into larger conflicts.

The causes for these environmental disasters are multiple and interlinked: rising temperatures, record low rainfalls due to the climate crisis; the drastic reduction of the amount of water reaching Iraq from upstream countries, with Turkey's extensive dam networks on the Tigris and Euphrates cutting Iraq's share by 60%, while nearby Iran has diverted tributaries and other rivers. The temperature rise is also causing an increase in water evaporation, contributing to the depletion of reservoirs.

According to the [GEO-6](#) report issued by the UN Environment Programme, Iraq is classified as the fifth most vulnerable country in the world to decreased water and food availability and extreme temperatures. The World Bank estimates that by 2050, average temperatures will increase by 2C and rainfall will decrease by 9%.

Iraq's population, which is entirely dependent on the Tigris and Euphrates along with other smaller rivers for irrigation, drinking and sanitation, has nearly doubled in the past two decades. Still, in a

country where corruption and mismanagement can turn a dire situation into a catastrophic one, archaic irrigation methods and depleted infrastructure that have seen no investment are wasting and polluting whatever water remains.

‘Traditional prejudice’

“It was on the edge of the marshes that human history in Iraq began.” So wrote the British traveller Wilfred Thesiger, who lived among the marsh Arabs, the Ma’dan, in the 1950s. At that time, it was possible to navigate the network of rivers, canals and lagoons across the plains of southern Iraq, connecting the Tigris marshes in the east to the central marshes of the Euphrates delta in the west.

The unique ecosystem functioned as a microclimate absorbing heat, with temperatures in the marshes up to 4C lower than in neighbouring areas, and the area was home to exceptional biodiversity. Then came industrialisation and mass agriculture, followed by wars, culminating in [Saddam Hussein’s onslaught against the marshes](#) in the 1990s, and now the drought.

Throughout these decades, government officials – from the British colonial officer to Saddam’s Republican Guard – saw in the dense marshes and dizzying maze of canals a place of refuge for those opposing central authority, from the African slaves who revolted in the ninth century, to communists and Islamist rebels in modern times, along with droves of military deserters who fled conscription.

That view of the marshes as a dangerous place and home to brigands contributed to the way the city people and countryside farmers looked at and despised the marsh Arabs.

“The impact of climate change is working as a threat magnifier,” said Dr Hassan al Janabi, a former minister for water resources and an environmental expert. “But in essence, this is a man-made disaster, in which the marshes are the clear victims, due to misunderstanding of the unique climate and cultural importance of the region.”

He added: “Its destruction is part of the traditional prejudice of the city towards the countryside, and especially against the marsh people who have always been the victims of discrimination and at the receiving end of insults because they raise buffaloes.

“There are hundreds of illegal rivers diverting water towards the lands of influential people who use them for fish farms or irrigating their lands. We have lost 80% of the buffaloes because of mismanagement.”

Just north of the Toos, which is supposed to feed water into the Huwaiza marsh, a local activist pointed out two large fish ponds and an illegally dug canal that siphons water into nearby agricultural lands, all belonging to a powerful local tribal sheikh. In the past month, even the trickle of water in the Toos had dried.

A ministry in Baghdad determines the allocation of water for irrigation to each province, with agriculture consuming the largest share of water – nearly 65%. The severe drought has led to an increase in competition, in which the interests of weaker communities, such as the marsh dwellers, are sacrificed in the interests of more powerful ones.

“This is a crime that is taking place right in front of our eyes,” said Janabi. “The marshes are the true historical lineage of Mesopotamia but these groups which have lived here for thousands of years see their way of life being eradicated for the benefit of rice cultivators, which in reality has zero economical impact as we import 95% of our rice.”

‘Revival has gone’

In the Chibayish, the central marshes in the basin of the Euphrates, the scenes of drought and devastation are repeated. What was once an extensive marshes network has shrunk today to a few isolated ponds of stagnating brackish water, stinking of dead fish and highly polluted, sitting amid large

swatches of desert landscape. The long, elegant mashoof boats that once plied these waters now lie on their sides, crusted with salt and dried mud.

On the edge of one of these ponds, Abdul Sattar and his two sons took shelter from the oppressive heat in a small mud room, bare except for two reed mats on the dirt floor. An old air cooler clanked noisily outside the small window, churning in hot air.

The eldest son, a slender young man in his 20s, served tea while Abdul pondered in silence for some time when asked about the impact of drought. When he spoke, the words tumbled fast in a heavy guttural accent. He said that in the past few months dozen of his buffaloes had died, and those that remained were too skinny to be sold. “If I butcher them and sell them as meat, they will fetch more,” he added, pulling at the tattered brim of his stained and muddy dishdasha.

In his 40s, with a gaunt face and bronze-coloured skin, withered and beaten by the harsh Iraqi sun, feet caked in mud and cracked, he looked at anyone coming from the city with suspicion. He said the buffaloes were unable to feed themselves because of the drought and were dependent on whatever fodder he could provide.

“They used to go out and graze for a week or two on the green reeds and other vegetation and only come back when they needed to be milked,” he said. “Now I have to feed them, each needs half a tonne of fodder a week, but I can barely afford half of that. Mothers don’t even produce enough milk to feed their calves.”

He looked at his youngest son across the room, a 12-year-old asleep under a blanket in a feeble attempt to hide from the buzzing flies, and said his family were going hungry so he could feed the buffaloes to keep them alive, barely.

The buffaloes refuse to drink the highly polluted water even when they find small mud pools to wallow in. He pointed towards the jug of brackish yellow water that sat in front of him and said he had to drive to the nearby town to buy the drinking water he shared between his family and his buffaloes.

Once before, the marshes where his clan raised their buffaloes had dried; that was in 1994, after Saddam’s campaign to dry the marshes. He was a young man then and accompanied his family as they moved north, finding shelter on the banks of the Tigris south of Baghdad, and he came back after the toppling of the regime, when reviving the marshes became a political priority. “Reviving the marshes was the only thing we got after the [regime] change, and even that is gone now.”

Outside the mud room, three emaciated-looking buffaloes sat in a small muddy pond. A larger herd stood nearby in the shade of a metal canopy. Abdul said generation after generation his tribe had lived with these buffaloes, so dear to them that they had given them individual names.

“These animals, they mean a lot for us, they are like family. We pain when we see them wither and die in front of our eyes,” he said. “I swear if I knew how to do anything else I would, but me and my father, and his father before him, knew nothing but how to raise buffaloes.”

Selling up and moving out

Agriculture, which generates 3% of Iraq’s GDP, employs nearly one-fifth of its workforce, tethering people to their lands and contributing to maintaining the vegetation coverage needed to lessen the impact of sandstorms, soil erosion and global heating.

However, the drought and subsequent crop failures are pushing thousands of families to abandon their lands – 20,000 since 2021, according to International Organization for Migration estimates – heading instead towards the big cities.

In a small neighbourhood tucked under an overpass north of the city of Basra, Karar lives with his family in a small hut built with concrete blocks. Like his neighbours', his roof is made of corrugated metal and plastic sheets, pinned down with large rocks and blocks. A deep and wide ditch carries the neighbourhood sewage, where trash and plastic bottles float on a grimy metallic green liquid.

As is the case for many of the farmers of Amara and Nassiriya – who at the best of times constituted the poorest people in Iraq – the drought has turned his hardship into destitution.

He said that a few years ago, he came to realise that farming was dying in his village north of the Huwaiza marsh. Water levels were falling, and he had to use a diesel pump to irrigate his fields. "The money we got, we paid on gas for the water pumps. We were going hungry," he said.

So he sold the few animals he had – sheep and a few buffaloes – and moved to this neighbourhood, trying to scavenge a living from the margins of Basra's booming oil-fuelled economy, working as a day labourer.

He said he was fortunate to sell his cattle and move out before the worst of the drought hit the area. "Now, my brothers call me and say we wish we left the land and came with you then because now no one wants to buy our buffaloes because they are too skinny."

Dead palms and buffaloes

In Seeba, in Iraq's most southern tip, the environmental disaster takes a different shape. Lying on the western banks of Shatt al-Arab, the waterway formed by the meeting of the Euphrates and Tigris, its fertile orchards and fields had been home to dense palm tree plantations for centuries. Water from Shatt al-Arab flows naturally through its canals, regulated by the high and low tide of the nearby Gulf.

During the war with Iran, Seeba became a frontline and battleground. Trenches were dug, fields of barbed wires were stretched, artillery bombardments and tanks destroyed the palm plantations, and thousands of young Iraqi and Iranian soldiers died there. However, after the end of the war, people came back and started reviving their land and eventually restored many of its palm groves.

"If you came here in the 90s, you wouldn't be able to see Abadan," said Ridha, a young farmer from the region, as he pointed at the gleaming towers of the Abadan refinery across the waterway.

But things began to change after 2004 when reduced levels of water flowing from the Tigris and Euphrates enabled seawater from the Gulf to intrude deeper and deeper into the Shatt al-Arab, eventually reaching Basra itself for the first time in 2018, which led to mass unrest.

"Since 2009, Seeba has been a disaster zone, and most of our farmlands have disappeared because of the catastrophic rise in water salinity," an official in the town said.

The exact causes of the drought in the north were reflected here, the official said. From the impact of global heating to Turkey's reduction of the water volume flowing through the Tigris and Euphrates, Iran's diversion of tributary rivers such as the Karun, and the discharge of raw sewage and oil industry chemicals into Shatt al-Arab. "Even the upstream provinces are taking Basra's share of fresh water because of the expansion of their population."

The high salinity in the water flowing naturally through the irrigation canals is now causing the palm trees to die. "All the water pumps on the riverbanks were cancelled, and farmers are blocking their own canals," said the official. "Now we get some water pumped from upstream through pipes, or we buy it in trucks. In 2012 the state allocated compensations for the farmers that they have yet to receive 10 years later."

A proposed mega-desalination project for seawater from the Gulf had been stalled for years, with politicians in Baghdad and Basra accusing each other of receiving kickbacks and commissions. "From a million palm trees in the 1970s, now we have less than 10,000. Farming here is living now by the drip."

Ridha, tall, lean, moustachioed and wearing a black dishdasha with a red checked kufiya wrapped around his head, pointed at the palm trees in his orchard, each named after the variety of its dates: “Khistawi, barhi, braim ...” But most of these precious palm trees died due to the polluted water, losing their tops and long branches, with the top of the trunks bent like a wilting stump.

He motioned towards a canal zigzagging between the dead trees. “The water is killing our palms,” he said. “Back in the 1990s we swam in these rivers, used the water for drinking and cooking, but now farmers are blocking their irrigation canals to prevent the poisonous water from entering their fields. Those who still want to farm have to buy trucks of water, but most are just abandoning the lands and getting a government job with the police or the Hashed [Shia paramilitary units].”

Ridha pointed at another scourge in the area’s environmental disaster, a large herd of buffaloes. As the drought destroyed the marsh habitat to the north, the Ma’dan owners moved their herds here, settling them among the fields and in the now dormant irrigation canals. They have become a real menace to the farmers.

Behind the banks of a wide irrigation canal thick with green waters, and lined with rows of decapitated palm trees, a large group of buffaloes sat submerged in a swamp.

Ridha looked at them and said they were worse than the plague. “They are destroying the land,” he said. “Their owners let them roam freely. They are heavy, and they break the earth, flood the area and turn the farms into swamps. Sometimes they break into orchards and feed on the young palm saplings; no fence can stand against them.”

The environmental collapse exacerbates the old tensions between the well-armed Ma’dan and the farmers. “If the farmers shoot at them or kill a buffalo, the owners will come armed and start a fight, and we can’t fight them,” said Ridha, “and now only the army can save us.”

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HEADLINE	01/30 Dallas Zoo latest bizarre incident
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/30/us/monkeys-missing-dallas-zoo.html
GIST	<p>Two emperor tamarin monkeys were apparently taken from the Dallas Zoo, officials said on Monday, the latest in a series of bizarre episodes that have included the escape and death of other animals this month.</p> <p>The habitat for the monkeys was found to have been “intentionally compromised,” and the breach was reported to the Dallas Police Department on Monday morning after members of the zoo’s animal care team discovered they were gone, said Kari Streiber, a zoo spokeswoman, in a statement.</p> <p>Other recent incidents at the Dallas Zoo — which says it houses more than 2,000 animals and more than 400 species on a 106-acre site south of downtown Dallas — have involved a clouded leopard, langur monkeys and a vulture. The recent disturbances to the animal habitats are under investigation by the Dallas Police Department, the authorities said. The police had not named any suspect or suspects in connection with those matters.</p> <p>On Jan. 13, a female clouded leopard disappeared for several hours, prompting a “Code Blue” alert at the zoo, which indicates that a nondangerous animal is out of its habitat. She was later found uninjured, but a “suspicious” tear was found in the enclosure, the authorities said. The opening was not an error or failure on the part of the habitat, exhibit or keeper, Gregg Hudson, the zoo’s president and chief executive, said earlier this month.</p> <p>The next day, similar cuts were found in the fencing of a habitat for langur monkeys, but all the monkeys were inside and appeared unharmed.</p> <p>“It is unknown if the two incidents are related,” the Dallas Police Department said in a statement.</p>

Then on Jan. 22, [an endangered vulture died](#) in “unusual” circumstances that seemed unnatural, a matter that is being investigated as suspicious, said Kristin Lowman, a police spokeswoman. The cause of death had not been determined as of Monday, pending a necropsy.

The zoo said that it added cameras and doubled overnight security after the leopard’s escape, but more than two weeks after the original episode the emperor tamarin monkeys seemed to have been targeted. The police said that an intentional cut was found in the monkey enclosure and that the animals appeared to have been taken intentionally. The zoo did not disclose how many animals were in the enclosure.

“Emperor tamarin monkeys would likely stay close to home,” Ms. Streiber said. “The zoo searched near their habitat and across zoo grounds, and did not locate them.”

Emperor tamarins are small monkeys native to the southwest Amazon basin and they have distinctive long whiskers that look like mustaches, [according to the Smithsonian National Zoo](#). They live for 10 to 20 years, staying in extended family groups of two to eight monkeys.

The Dallas Zoo was closed on Monday because of inclement weather and would remain closed through Wednesday, it said on Twitter.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Woman w/tuberculosis refuses treatment
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/health-department-tacoma-woman-with-tuberculosis-refusing-treatment
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. - The Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department is monitoring a case of active tuberculosis (TB) in a woman in Tacoma, who is currently declining treatment.</p> <p>TB is curable with medication but if left untreated, results in death. People with active, untreated infections are contagious and represent a risk to others, according to the health department.</p> <p>Anyone exposed to a person with TB can become infected, but TB is not easily spread-- you need to be in a closed space for an extended amount of time with the infected person.</p> <p>The health department says it is currently working with the woman and her family to persuade her to get treatment to cure her TB. The department did not specify why the woman is refusing treatment.</p> <p>"Most people we contact are happy to get the treatment they need," said Nigel Turner, division director of Communicable Disease Control. "Occasionally people refuse treatment and isolation. When that happens, we take steps to help keep the community safe."</p> <p>The health department has legal authority to seek a court order to get patients into treatment, though it's rarely been done, Turner said.</p> <p>Turner told FOX 13 that in the last 20 years, they've only had to turn to legal avenues three times.</p> <p>"We can ask for assistance in the implication of the orders and ultimately request detention," Turner said. "A legal court order that requires people to take the court order or isolate in jail."</p> <p>Treatment can take up to nine months.</p> <p>Healthcare providers are required by law to report all cases of TB to the local health department, according to Washington State Law.</p> <p>There are, on average, about 20 cases of active TB per year in Pierce County. These infections usually impact the lungs, but it can be found in other parts of the body. Active TB is not common in the United States.</p>

HEADLINE	01/30 Study: breach warming threshold 10-12yrs
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/science/ai-world-likely-to-hit-key-warming-threshold-in-10-12-years/
GIST	<p>The world will likely breach the internationally agreed-upon climate change threshold in about a decade, and keep heating to break through a next warming limit around mid-century even with big pollution cuts, artificial intelligence predicts in a new study that's more pessimistic than previous modeling.</p> <p>The study in Monday's journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences reignites a debate on whether it's still possible to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, as called for in the 2015 Paris climate agreement, to minimize the most damaging effects of climate change. The world has already warmed 1.1 or 1.2 degrees since pre-industrial times, or the mid-19th century, scientists say.</p> <p>Two climate scientists using machine learning calculated that Earth will surpass the 1.5 degree (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) mark between 2033 and 2035. Their results fit with other, more conventional methods of predicting when Earth will break the mark, though with a bit more precision.</p> <p>"There will come a time when we call the 1.5C target for maximum warming dead, beyond the shadow of a doubt," Brown University environment institute director Kim Cobb, who wasn't part of the study, said in an email interview. "And this paper may be the beginning of the end of the 1.5C target."</p> <p>Stanford University's Noah Diffenbaugh, a study co-author, said the world is on the brink of the 1.5-degree mark in "any realistic emissions reduction scenario." Avoiding a 2-degree rise, he said, may depend on nations meeting zero-emissions goals by the middle of this century.</p> <p>The artificial intelligence-based study found it unlikely that temperature increase could be held below 2 degrees Celsius, even with tough emissions cuts. And that's where the AI really differs with scientists who had been forecasting using computer models that are based on past observations, Diffenbaugh said.</p> <p>In a high-pollution scenario, the AI calculated, the world would hit the 2-degree mark around 2050. Lower pollution could stave that off until 2054, the machine learning calculated.</p> <p>In contrast, the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change figured in its 2021 report that the same lower-pollution scenario would see the world pushing past 2 degrees sometime in the 2090s.</p> <p>Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald, who wasn't part of the Diffenbaugh study but was part of the IPCC, said the study makes sense, fits with what scientists know, but seems a bit more pessimistic.</p> <p>There's a lot of power in using AI and in the future that may be shown to produce better projections, but more evidence is needed before concluding that, Mahowald said.</p> <p>Normally, climate scientists use a bunch of computer model simulations, some running hot and some cold, and then try to figure out which ones are doing the best job. That's often based on how they performed in the past or in simulations of the past, Diffenbaugh said. What the AI does is more keyed to the climate system now, he said.</p> <p>"We're using this very powerful tool that is able to take information and integrate it in a way that no human mind is able to do, for better or for worse," Diffenbaugh said.</p> <p>Each year, government climate negotiators at a United Nations summit proclaim that they have managed to "keep 1.5 alive." But with the latest study there's a divide among scientists on how true that really is. Diffenbaugh said there's been so much warming already that it really doesn't matter how pollution is cut in the next several years, the world will hit 1.5, the AI figures.</p>

Zeke Hausfather of the tech company Stripe and Berkeley Earth, who was not part of the study, agreed, saying it's time to "stop pretending" that limiting warming to 1.5 degrees is possible. Some scenarios do see temperatures warming past the mark but then coming back down, something called "overshoot."

Other scientists not involved with the study, such as University of Pennsylvania's Michael Mann and Climate Analytics' Bill Hare and Carl-Friedrich Schleussner maintain 1.5 is still alive. They say one rapid decarbonization scenario that Diffenbaugh didn't examine shows the world can mostly keep under the threshold.

If the world can cut its carbon emissions in half by 2030 "then warming can be limited to 1.5 degrees" with a tiny overshoot and then reductions to get under the mark, Hare said.

Believing that the world can no longer keep warming below 1.5 "is a self-fulfilling prophecy," Mann said by email. "In the end it's easy to overinterpret the significance of a precise threshold like 1.5C warming. The challenge is to limit warming as much as possible."

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	01/30 Mali: arrest in 10 mystery beheadings
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/main-suspect-arrested-10-beheadings-mali/
GIST	<p>Investigations into a string of beheadings in southern Mali that have shocked the nation in Africa's Sahel region have scored a breakthrough, judicial and police sources said on Monday. Ten people in the cotton-growing town of Fana have been decapitated since 2018, sparking fears of ritual killings.</p> <p>"We have arrested the main suspect," local prosecutor Boubacar Moussa Diarra told AFP by phone.</p> <p>"The details he gave of the crimes correspond to the nature of the murders," he said.</p> <p>A police official who declined to be named revealed the suspect had been arrested a year ago but had only confessed last week to the grisly murders.</p> <p>Neither the prosecutor nor the police official revealed the possible motive for the crimes.</p> <p>The victims included a former soldier, a housewife, a five-year-old albino child and a 2-year-old girl, and had apparently nothing in common.</p> <p>In most cases, their heads were found, but their blood had been collected, sparking fears of ritual murders and demands for a local police station that were met in 2019.</p> <p>The local authorities have urged caution regarding theories surrounding the killings and stress that the investigation is continuing.</p> <p>Mali has continued to be a danger zone for civilians and peacekeepers, especially since a 2020 military coup and the "activities of extremist groups," the United Nations said last week. The U.N. warned about continuing violence in the nation after the abduction of a doctor working for the U.N. health agency.</p> <p>A U.N. mission in Mali launched about a decade ago following insecurity in the north and the military coup. On Friday, U.N. Special Representative El-Ghassim Wane told the Security Council that stabilizing Mali is crucial, "not only for the country but for the entire region."</p> <p>Wane said the U.N. mission "has continued to make a sustained effort to protect civilians."</p>

	"It's done so despite the difficult environment in which it operates and the gaps in capacity, which are significant," he said.
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HEADLINE	01/30 TX hookah lounge shooting: 1 dead, 4 hurt
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/teen-killed-four-others-injured-in-shooting-at-texas-lounge/
GIST	<p>AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A high school student was killed and four others were injured when a person opened fire over the weekend at a hookah lounge in Austin, Texas, authorities said Monday.</p> <p>Brayden Bolyard, 17, died at the scene of the shooting at the lounge Saturday night, Austin police said in a news release. Police said that the four other people who were shot were taken to hospitals.</p> <p>Police said in the news release that they have identified a person of interest in the shooting and that the shooter “had prior history with one of the victims.” The suspect left the scene after the shooting, police said.</p> <p>The school district in Jarrell, which is about 40 miles north of Austin, said in a statement Monday that the district was “profoundly saddened by the loss of one of our students.”</p> <p>“He was a gifted student and athlete who made a lasting impression on our district,” the Jarrell Independent School District said in the statement.</p> <p>The district said that counselors would be providing support to students and staff. The district said another student from the district was still hospitalized.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Tenino transitional home in death threats
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/tenino-transitional-home-receives-death-threats-amid-news-it-may-house-sex-offenders-prison-thurston-county-public-washington-state-department-corrections-sheriff-office-response-residents-concern-less-restrictive-alternative-housing-supreme-living-llc#
GIST	<p>TENINO, Wash. — Employees related to a transitional home in Tenino that recently received pushback after news it may house multiple sex offenders are now receiving death threats, according to Thurston County Sheriff's Office (TCSO).</p> <p>Up to five Level 3 sex offenders who have completed their prison sentence could move into the two-story home as soon as this week. That news caused a public outcry which led community members to speak online and at meetings due to the fact that Level 3 sex offenders are considered most likely to re-offend.</p> <p>Residents told KOMO News they learned about the Less Restrictive Alternative (LRA) and its potential residents via a community Facebook post on Jan. 11, nearly three weeks before the offenders would be able to move in. LRA houses residents by court order who are approved for homes like the one in Tenino to serve out their civil commitment.</p> <p>"Threats to kill, property destruction, or any other criminal acts will not solve the issue at hand. As a community, we have the opportunity to systemically change the current legislation put forth through legal and morally acceptable avenues," said Thurston County Sheriff Derek Sanders in a letter Monday.</p> <p>Sanders has been an outspoken opponent of the home saying he doesn't think the housing is a good idea because of the rural location and limited resources. He said he's coordinating a safety response in the event of an emergency with the DOC.</p> <p>TCSO said the threats were directed to Supreme Living LLC, Department of Corrections (DOC), and Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) employees and property.</p>

	<p>"This is unacceptable. I empathize with the frustrations of our community, however threats of violence will not be tolerated and are subject to criminal enforcement," said Sanders. "Your local county officials are working around the clock to address this issue to the best of our abilities, and making threats to kill or injure members of our community is detrimental to that work."</p> <p>KOMO News reached out to Supreme Living's CEO Monday, Jan. 23 for comment on the sex offenders' potential move-in, but hasn't heard back.</p> <p>Washington State Representative Dan Griffey of the 35th Legislative District said there is legislation in the early stages being drafted aimed at replacing LRAs with one facility owned and operated by the state for residents leaving McNeil Island to complete their civil commitment. He said the legislation would impose stronger requirements for public notice and public comment for privately operated group homes that house sex offenders deemed dangerous by the state.</p> <p>Griffey said he's unaware of any wrongdoing with regard to public notification, but insisted residents felt blindsided and should have more opportunity for public comment.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Slovenia arrests 2: Russia espionage spies
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/law-enforcement-slovenia-ljubljana-espionage-9b0679c1f35682fc9c427a60ec6b8764
GIST	<p>LJUBLJANA, Slovenia (AP) — Slovenian authorities have apprehended two alleged Russian spies suspected of using an agency dealing in real estate and antiques as a front for their activities in the NATO member, media reported Monday.</p> <p>Slovenia's respected Delo newspaper and the Siol news portal cited the public prosecutor's office as confirming the arrests.</p> <p>Slovenian police confirmed that two individuals had been arrested in December for suspected espionage but did not disclose which country they were accused of working for.</p> <p>"They are suspected of being members of a foreign intelligence service," police spokesman Drago Menegalija said.</p> <p>The two "resided and did business in Slovenia with illegally obtained foreign personal documents and a false identity and carried out covert intelligence activities for the benefit of a foreign intelligence service," added Menegalija.</p> <p>According to the media outlets, the two individuals were arrested on Dec. 5 and remain in custody as the prosecutors continue their probe into espionage allegations.</p> <p>Police said they acted in cooperation with the Slovenian Intelligence and Security Agency and based on directions from the Ljubljana District Prosecutor's Office.</p> <p>The suspects' detention "prevented harmful consequences for the country's national security, its political, economic and security interests, as well as international security," said Menegalija.</p> <p>Andrej Benedejcic, a former ambassador who now deals with national security issues at the office of Slovenia's prime minister, said that if official proceedings affirm the suspects' true intentions, their detention would mark the greatest success for Slovenia's state intelligence agency.</p> <p>If found guilty, the suspects face in total up to eight years in prison.</p> <p>The report in Delo said the suspects had used a rented office in the capital Ljubljana as their base of operations.</p>

	The suspects have also been active abroad, with one of the two holding Argentinian citizenship, according to the reports. The 24ur news portal said the suspects were a married couple whose child went to school in Slovenia.
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HEADLINE	01/30 Brussels subway stabbing attack: 3 injured
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/reports-man-stabbed-suspect-detained-brussels-incident-96767739
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS -- A lone assailant wielding a knife injured three people in Brussels on Monday during a rush-hour rampage through a subway car before being detained by police in the station under the European Union's headquarters, officials said.</p> <p>The Brussels prosecutor's spokesperson, Martin Francois, said one of the three injured people was taken to hospital and remained in a "life-threatening" condition. The two others were treated for lesser injuries.</p> <p>Francois told the Associated Press that at first sight "there were no indications of terrorism." He said the suspect was a 30-year-old male. Since Belgium was hit by twin terror outrages in Brussels and Zaventem that killed 32 civilians six years ago, fears of a terror motive are never far away in cases of apparently random public attacks.</p> <p>Social media posts showed police with their guns pointed at a man at the Schuman station, while others showed a man wrapped in warming foil being attended to by first aid officials outside it. The station is directly under the main office of the EU's executive Commission.</p> <p>AP reporters on the scene said the area was quickly sealed off during the evening rush hour incident. Main broadcasters like RTL and VRT said panic briefly broke out in the subway station before order was restored.</p> <p>The incident took on special significance after last week's killing of a church official by a machete-wielding assailant in southern Spain.</p> <p>In Germany two teenagers were stabbed to death and five other passengers injured on a train in northern Germany.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 US sanctions Sinaloa cartel operator
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-sanctions-mexican-international-cartel-lieutenant-96774623
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- The U.S. Treasury Department announced sanctions Monday on an international operator for the Sinaloa drug cartel whose activities span the globe.</p> <p>The Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control blocked any U.S. properties of José Angel Rivera Zazueta and two other men.</p> <p>The department said Rivera Zazueta's network "operates on a global scale with nodes in the United States, Mexico, South and Central America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia."</p> <p>"Rivera Zazueta imports precursor chemicals from China to Mexico, which are then used to manufacture synthetic drugs," including the deadly opioid fentanyl and crystal methamphetamine.</p> <p>It said he worked with a Chinese chemical transportation company, Shanghai Fast-Fine Chemicals, "which has shipped various, often falsely labeled precursor chemicals to Drug Trafficking Organizations in Mexico for illicit fentanyl production intended for U.S. markets."</p>

	<p>Over 70,000 Americans died of overdoses involving opioids in 2020, mainly fentanyl.</p> <p>Mexican cartels often press the drug into pills that mimic legitimate medications, making it all that much more deadly, because many victims do not know they are taking fentanyl.</p> <p>The department said Rivera Zazueta also has moved “large quantities of cocaine from Colombia to the United States, Spain, Italy, Guatemala, Mexico, and other countries in Europe and Central America.”</p> <p>Also designated for sanctions Monday were his Mexican associate, Nelton Santiso Aguila, and Guatemalan national Jason Antonio Yang Lopez.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Report: link between corruption, violence
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/global-report-highlights-link-corruption-violence-96783238
GIST	<p>BERLIN -- Most of the world continues to fail to fight corruption with 95 % of countries having made little to no progress since 2017, a closely watched study by an anti-graft organization found Tuesday.</p> <p>Transparency International’s 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index, which measures the perception of public sector corruption according to experts and businesspeople, also found that governments hampered by corruption lack the capacity to protect the people, while public discontent is more likely to turn into violence.</p> <p>“Corruption has made our world a more dangerous place. As governments have collectively failed to make progress against it, they fuel the current rise in violence and conflict – and endanger people everywhere,” said Delia Ferreira Rubio, the chairperson of Transparency International.</p> <p>“The only way out is for states to do the hard work, rooting out corruption at all levels to ensure governments work for all people, not just an elite few,” she added.</p> <p>The report ranks countries on a scale from a “highly corrupt” 0 to a “very clean” 100. Denmark is seen as the least corrupt this year with 90 points, and Finland and New Zealand both follow closely at 87. Strong democratic institutions and regard for human rights also make these countries some of the most peaceful in the world, the report said.</p> <p>However, the report also shows that while western Europe remains the top-scoring region, some of its countries are showing worrying signs of decline.</p> <p>The United Kingdom dropped five points to 73 — its lowest ever score. The report said a number of scandals from public spending to lobbying, as well as revelations of ministerial misconduct, have highlighted woeful inadequacies in the country’s political integrity systems. Public trust in politics is also worryingly low, it said.</p> <p>Countries like Switzerland, at 82, and the Netherlands, which scored 80 points, are showing signs of decline amidst concerns over weak integrity and lobbying regulations — even though their scores remain high in comparison to the rest of the world.</p> <p>In eastern Europe corruption is seen as remaining rampant as many countries reached historic lows.</p> <p>Russia in particular was highlighted as a glaring example of corruption's impact on peace and stability.</p> <p>The country's invasion of Ukraine almost a year ago was a stark reminder of the threat that corruption and the absence of government accountability pose for global peace and security, the report said. It added that kleptocrats in Russia, which is at 28 points, have amassed great fortunes by pledging loyalty to President Vladimir Putin in exchange for profitable government contracts and protection of their economic interests.</p>

“The absence of any checks on Putin’s power allowed him to pursue his geopolitical ambitions with impunity,” the report concluded. “This attack destabilized the European continent, threatening democracy, and has killed tens of thousands.”

Before the invasion, Ukraine, which scored 33 points, had a low score but was undertaking important reforms and steadily improving. Even after the outbreak of the war, the country continued to prioritize anti-corruption reforms. However, wars disrupt normal processes and exacerbate risks, the report pointed out, allowing corrupt actors to pocket funds meant for recovery. Earlier this month investigations exposed alleged war profiteering by several senior officials.

The index rated 180 countries and territories. Somalia was at the bottom with 12 points; South Sudan tied with Syria for second-to-last with 13.

Only eight countries improved last year, among them Ireland with 77 points, South Korea with 63, Armenia at 46, and Angola at 33.

The report also pointed out how after decades of conflict, South Sudan is in a major humanitarian crisis with more than half of the population facing acute food insecurity — and corruption is exacerbating the situation.

In Yemen, at 16, where complaints of corruption helped spark civil war eight years ago, the report said that the state has collapsed, leaving two-thirds of the population without sufficient food in what has become one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.

Compiled since 1995, the index is calculated using 13 different data sources that provide perceptions of public sector corruption from businesspeople and country experts. Sources include the World Bank, the World Economic Forum and private risk and consulting companies.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Florida mass shooting: 10 wounded
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/9-people-hurt-mass-shooting-florida-police/story?id=96777427
GIST	<p>A mass shooting in a Florida city has left 10 people wounded, the Lakeland Police Department announced on Monday.</p> <p>According to police, two victims are critically injured and eight face non-life-threatening injuries.</p> <p>"One is in surgery and the other is either in surgery or headed to surgery," Lakeland Police Chief Sam Taylor said at a press conference on Monday.</p> <p>Police responded to calls of a shooting at a location near Iowa Avenue North and Plum Street at 3:43 p.m.</p> <p>All the victims were adult men between 20 and 35 years old, according to Taylor.</p> <p>Lakeland Police did not identify any suspects, but believe that four alleged shooters fired guns on both sides of the street from their vehicle, which Taylor described as a four-door Nissan.</p> <p>Police believe the shooting wasn't random and the victims were targeted.</p> <p>We don't believe there's any reason that the public would need to be concerned right now," Taylor said. "We think that the individuals in the car shot at and shot who they wanted to shoot."</p> <p>Authorities added that they located marijuana at the scene, hinting that marijuana was being sold at the time of the incident, but there is no information on whether the suspected sale of marijuana and the shooting are linked.</p>
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